

The NORTHEAST SAGA



P.K.BANDYOPADHYAY



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A NEW ODYSSEY

IT IS AN odyssey to the mystic land. The land which resembles an inverted pyramid held sideways. India's northeast represents a synthesis of cultures and fusion of races. An epitome of the sub-continent. Who have not come and settled down here—into this enchanting land hemmed in by the eastern Himalayas, Tibet, China, Myanmar and Bangladesh? The people speaking the Sino-Tibetan group of languages, the Austriacs, the Dravidians, the Indo-Aryans and the people from the Shan plateau of northern Myanmar, all came and evolved a composite identity. Though the benign Circa transmuted them!

The northeastern region with an area of 2,54,956 square kilometres, at least the major part of it, was formed about thirty million years ago. The Shillong plateau evolved with the great geostatic movement connected with the uplift of the Himalayas. The Brahmaputra valley, mostly built by the silt brought down by the rivers, the geologists say, is more recent in origin. It is difficult to say anything about the life and culture of the northeast in the pre-historic times. The archaeological data are too sketchy to come to a definite conclusion. However, the rich megalithic remains, and the customs associated with them particularly in the Khasi Hills and Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya in the North Cachar Hills of Assam and Nagaland are examples of a pre-historic tradition.

The present odyssey is in a way part of many wanderings over the centuries to the myths and geography of the land in search of the alchemy of integration. The Sanskritization process with the priests and warriors spreads from the Gangetic plain to the Brahmaputra valley. References in the Adi Kanda of the *Ramayana*, the *Puranas* and Tantras bear testimony to the eastward travel of the influence of the Aryavarta. Bhagadatta, the king of Pragjyotisha is said to have taken part in the battle of Kurukshetra with a large army of Kiratas as an ally of the Kauravas. The Puranic legends say that the ruling dynasties of Pragjyotisha and Kamrupa have come down

from Vishnu. The son of Vishnu and the Earth was Naraka and Bhagadatta was Narak's son. The role of Ghatotkacha, the son of Bhima by Hirimba, the queen of Kachari kingdom on the side of the Pandavas is part of the mythological tradition. Sonitpur near Tezpur, the mythical king Banasura, friend of Naraka and father of Usha, consort of Anirudha and their references in folklore, Mairanka or Mahiranga near Guwahati, all show the remnants of the cultural extension of the Gangetic belt. Kalidasa's '*Raghuvansam*' says that King Raghu conquered Pragjyotisha kingdom crossing the Lohit river.

The Dah Prabatiya gate and rock cut images of Agni, Siva and Durga near Tezpur, the Kamakhya temple on the Nilachal hill, the temple at Hajo and Mahabhairab temple near Tezpur are examples of the same tradition. One can see the early Buddhist influence in the construction of the domes of temples in the shape of shikharas, stupas and chaityas.

The Assamese language belongs to the Indo-Aryan group of languages and it is essentially Sanskritic in origin. Various rock and copper plate inscriptions indicate the cultivation of Sanskrit and an unmistakable influence from the Gangetic plain.

Another historic travel in the seventh century was to unravel the mystery of the kingdom—Kamrupa. This time by a famous Chinese traveler, Yuan Chuang. He visited the land during the reign of Bhaskaravarman (594-650 A.D.) and described different events and aspects of life and society in his travelogue. He wrote that the kingdom of Kamrupa was on the northeast of Pundravardhan and he entered Kamrupa crossing the river Karotoya. Kamrupa was then enjoying its heydays. King Harsavardhan and Bhaskaravarman were very good friends. Banvatta's '*Harsacharita*' corroborates the glorious days of Kamrupa and the participation of Bhaskaravarmana in the great Buddhist congregation at Kanouj.

The story of the travel was not just from the West. The migration of people from the East and northeast is no less absorbing with abundant pathways over the mountains. There were many ethnic entities with a network covering the fringe areas of the hill ridges. The agnates of various groups are attracted to the people of similar affinities. The epoch-making significant advent was that of the Ahoms from the Irawati Valley in Myanmar in 1228 AD. Sukapha

with a band of followers entered Assam crossing the Patkai range. The Ahoms gradually consolidated their control over a large part of the valley. The Ahoms belonging to the Shan tribe of Mongoloid origin gradually merged with the local people and their culture. One may safely say that the history of Assam at least till their rule up to 1826 was virtually a history of the Ahoms. The Koch, Kachari and Chutiya rulers also had their sway for considerable period in many areas.

Though the Ahom kings had their sway for several centuries on what they called the country of Golden Gardens, the Mughals made several attempts to capture Assam. Mir Jumla's invasion in 1662 was temporarily successful and the Ahom outpost at Gargaon fell. A truce was arrived at in 1663 with the Ahom King Jayadhwaj Singh. It was short-lived as the successor King Chakradhwaj Singh abrogated the treaty and a battle followed. The Mughal army under General Ram Singh had a fierce battle at Saraighat on the mighty Brahmaputra in 1671. The Ahom Army under Lachit Barphukan was victorious. It was a historic assertion of Assam's pride and glory. Assam was outside the Mughal Empire.

It was not just the Ahoms, but many tribes and ethnic groups entered the northeast region over centuries in batches from various areas of dispersal on the east and northeast beyond the present day boundaries. The account of their movement and gradual assimilation and absorption forms part of the interesting saga of human history.

Another travelogue of far-reaching implications has been scripted by the British. The Ahom power had a gradual decline with internal quarrels and court intrigues. The first sign of decay of the Ahom rulers was evident with what is known as the Maomaria rebellion. The Maomaria were a religious sect and the rebellion led by a priest forced the Ahom King Gaurinath Singh to seek the assistance from the British in 1792. Lord Cornwallis sent a detachment of British troops under Captain Welsh to suppress the rebellion and also with an eye on the British interests. The rebellion was suppressed and Captain Welsh sent an elaborate report on the conditions in Assam to the British government. The Captain in his report suggested that a brigade of the British army be kept in Assam with the cost being borne by the Ahom King. It was a report after an on the spot study on the administrative system, the state of its economy and the

overall situation. But Sir John Shore succeeded Lord Cornwallis in the meantime and the British government put in place the non-intervention policy. Captain Welsh was asked to withdraw the British soldiers.

Things came to a sorry pass with the withdrawal of the British army. An Ahom King, Chandra Kanta Singh was deposed by his ministers. As he did not get any assistance from the British, he looked towards Burma. The King of Burma came for help. But his interventions exacerbated the Anglo-Burmese relations. The initial successes of the Burmese in Arakan, Assam, Manipur, Cachar and Jaintia sent shock waves to the East India Company in Calcutta. The Government of Lord Amherst had no option but to declare war on Burma on March 5, 1824. The later events went in favour of the British. The Treaty of Yandabo was signed on February 24, 1826. Article 2 of it says.:

‘His Majesty the King of Ava renounces all claims upon, and will abstain from all future interferences with, the principality of Assam, and its dependencies, and also with the contiguous petty states of Cachar and Jyantea (Jaintia). With regard to Munnipore (Manipur), it is stipulated that, should Gumbheer Singh desire to return to that country, he shall be recognized by the King of Ava as Rajah thereof.’

The declaration of the British Governor-General-in-Council is unambiguous:

‘By our expulsion of the Burmese from the territory of Assam the country would... become ours by conquest’. David Scott was appointed Agent to the Governor General for Assam. The British Agent gradually consolidated their hold on the territory by pursuing a policy of treaties and adjustment. The Valley of the Brahmaputra and other areas were subsequently brought under the direct administration of the British. By 1874 the administration of many adjacent territories like Cachar, Jaintia, Sadiya and other hill areas were tagged to Assam and a separate Chief Commissionership for Assam was created by a proclamation of the Governor-General in Council. The Political Officer of Manipur and the Lushai Hills District were placed with the Assam administration. Following the partition of Bengal, Assam was combined with East Bengal to form a new province in 1905. However, with the annulling of the partition of Bengal, Assam was restored to its earlier status in 1912. Some

administrative changes and provisions like 'excluded area' and partially excluded status for the hills were introduced following the promulgation of the Government of India Acts of 1919 and 1935. Countless Christian missionaries coming from the West and the British administration left a very powerful impact and transformed the socio-cultural structures of the people in the hills.

The northeast is a cauldron where the process of melting, churning and merging is a continuous process. Its imprint is indelible on the travelogues of the travellers, and pilgrims.

The popular fable that the Kamrupa-Kamakhya cast a magic spell on the visitors and convert them into sheep, perhaps stems from this power of absorption. The charm of the green and fertile land and the majesty of the Brahmaputra and the impact of the soft climate are the contributory factors.

Another piece of travelogue was enacted by the advent of the tea industry and the people associated with it. This happened with the consolidation of the British control in Assam. The soil of Upper Assam was found to be fertile and suitable for the cultivation of tea and it emerged as a major economic activity of the area. Assam is now the largest producer of tea, with a share of over 50 per cent of the total production of tea in India. The industry brought in its wake an influx of a large number of people as tea garden labourers. Different ethnic groups came to Assam through this 'tea route'. Most of the garden labourers are from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal. Continuous contact and interaction among these people in the tea gardens in the Brahmaputra Valley helped evolve a new tradition with the gradual assimilation of various cultural practices.

In the Barak Valley, broadly two different ethnic groups constitute the majority of the tea garden labourers. One is known as the 'Hindustani Samaj' with migrants from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, while the other is known as 'Bengali Samaj'. Both the groups have developed a composite character with increased exposure and interaction. The cultural assimilation process is an active on-going phenomenon, which has helped in the solidarity of the people. It is seen that instead of Dusshera, the groups perform Durga Puja, which is the popular festival in the Barak valley. The influence is evident even in various rituals and social activities.

It is thus a long travelogue—an unforgettable destination, an enchanting land of about forty million people of diverse ethnicity in transition. The dynamism is writ large on all the three divisions—the Meghalaya plateau, the northeastern hills and basins and the Brahmaputra valley. In addition to the Brahmaputra valley covering twenty-two per cent of the region there are synclinal valley of Imphal in Manipur, three well-known plains of Champhai, Vanlaiphai and Thenzawl in Mizoram and low lands with numerous hillocks in Western Tripura. The two river systems of the Brahmaputra and the Barak have deeply influenced the topography and the people in the region. The Brahmaputra with over forty major tributaries flowing from the northern and southern mountains has lent a distinctive character. The Barak-Surma-Kusiara system has covered the Barak valley with hills, low lands and plain areas. With many variations in altitude, rainfall and the climate in general the region abounds in vegetation of three broad kinds—tropical, temperate and alpine. The tropical vegetation is available in areas with 900 metres of elevation. The temperate vegetation grows at an altitude of 1300 and 2500 metres, while the alpine vegetation is found in high mountains.

So it is a region of broken topography with inadequate means of modern transportation. Even then the States are serviced by roads including National Highways, waterways, and airways. Assam and a couple of States like Nagaland, Tripura are also covered by Railways network. The days of bullock carts and tongas on the Guwahati-Shillong road, for example, are over and the distance of over one hundred kilometers is now covered in just two and a half hours on a good and wide motorable road in the undulating terrain. Today one can imagine the toughness of the journey on the tonga service which had been introduced by Golam Hyder Mollah, an enterprising businessman in 1887. The service had been in operation till 1906, when the automobile service emerged on the scene.

Landing at Guwahati, the capital of the land of Red Rivers and Blue Hills, one is struck by the soothing greenery and the plethora of arecanut trees. The journey on the artery roads from Saraighat to North Lakhimpur on the north banks of the Brahmaputra and Murkongselek to Pasighat or to Dibrugarh through Sivsagar, Kaziranga famous for the one-horned rhinoceros, and Charaideo, a holy place of maidams of the Ahom Kings, and beyond to Dimapur-Kohima and Imphal, or through Guwahati Shillong - Silchar -

Aizawl - Lunglei - Saiha and Silchar - Dharmanagar and beyond or from Tejpur to Itanagar, to Tawang via Bhalukpong, Bomdilla and Sela Pass is no doubt the travellers' delight. The dark green of the tea plantations on the sides of the road, the trees on the mountain slopes and the vast stretches of riverine and marshy lands — is an orgy of colours and a symphony of varying shades.

The travel on the artery roads presents not just a variety of terrain but a unique diversity all around. Every few kilometres the pattern, physical features change. So do the languages, dialects, dresses, food habits, customs — the overall cultural ambience and the ways of living.

The societies are in transition. The journey began on the lines of the Ulysses Voyage of Tim Severin in search of the pathways of the countless people and ethnic groups into the sea of the northeastern humanity. It further wanted to discover the key to the evolution of a veritable composite entity. Various influences and initiatives — social, political, economic and cultural were at work. Constant contact with other communities through either migration or development of better communication led to tension, conflict, churning and then resolution. The hill areas and various tribal groups got the protection of the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. The regions further stabilized with its re-organization in 1972 and in 1986. The land search for the northeast corroborated the story lines of the myths and histories unfolded earlier. It could trace out the leavening factors for transformation and evolution of people and societies through chrysalis stages.

And it was not always a case of an ideal life, adequate food supplies and a non-exploitative socio-economic situation. Some of the problems in those societies, in fact, stem not only from the external factors like disruption of their life-pattern by invasion of their habitat by other people but also from many internal factors inherent in the societal structures.

Our journey began - to all the seven States, known as Seven Sisters.

THE DAWN – LIT MOUNTAINS

ARUNACHAL PRADESH WITH an area of 83,578 square kilometres and a population of 10,91,117 is a small part of our great country. The people here have varied and colourful ways of life in the beautiful background of the dawn-lit mountains. The land of the rising sun, as it is called, stretches from the region of eternal snows on the southern limits of Tibet down to the plains of the Brahmaputra valley. Myanmar lies on the east, while Bhutan on the west. The beauty is unique with snow-capped mountains, countless roaring streams, the murmuring rivulets, and the majestic forests, the green valleys and meadows with thousands of blooming flowers. In fact, as a writer put it, 'the snow-clad mountains all along the northern boundary, the river scenery of Siang, the pines and rhododendrons of Kameng, the austere grandeur of the Lohit valley, the splendid uplands of the Patkoi, the gentle woods and fields of the Apatani plateau make the traveller feel as if the spray of an inexhaustible fountain of beauty was blown into his face.'

The people are no less enchanting. They are essentially the products of geography and its heterogeneity. It is significant that the vast majority of the people of the State worship the Sun and the Moon—Donyi and Polo in the local dialect. The racial and cultural identities of the people can be identified in five broad divisions of the State—Kameng, Subansiri, Siang, Lohit and Tirap. For example, Monpa, Sherdukpen, Miching, Sulung Aka, Khowa, and Dafla live in East and West Kameng while Apatani, Tagin, Hill Miri, Nishi, and Nishang live in Upper and Lower Subansiri. Minyong, Padam, Gallong, Khamba, Monpa and Tagin live in East and West Siang, who broadly are known as Adis and Idus. Miju, Digaru, Khamti, and Singpho live in Lohit and Dibang Valley, while Wancho, Nocte, Singpho and Tangsa in Tirap.

The Adi is a general name for a number of tribes. They are—Gallong, Minyong, Padam, Pasi, Bori, Bokar, Pailibo, Ramo and Milang. The three tribes—Idu, Digaru and Miji have also a generic

name as Mishmi. The Tangsas in Tirap are divided into twelve sub-tribes.

Arunachal Pradesh was formerly known as North East Frontier Agency (NEFA). The term was actually coined for these hilly and tribal areas after the expedition in the Adi territory in Siang in 1911-12. The Assam Inner Line Regulations of 1873, promulgated to keep the tribal areas separate, was applied. After Independence the plains portions of the erstwhile Sela Sub-Agency were handed over to Assam. Later Tuensang Division was amalgamated with the Naga Hills in 1957. Thereafter the five Divisions—Kameng, Subansiri, Siang, Lohit and Tirap formed NEFA and the Governor of Assam administered it. The Chinese invasion in 1962 brought about a sea change and the need for a new approach in the pattern of administration in NEFA was felt. The administrative machinery was revamped in 1963. Later in May 1964 the Governor formed a committee to consider setting up and further expansion of local self-government in NEFA. The committee recommended a three-tier Panchayat system --- Gram Panchayat, Anchal Samiti and Zila Parishad and Advisory Council at the central level. Accordingly Raj Regulation 1967 was formulated and implemented. At the central Government level the NEFA subject was transferred to the Home Ministry from the External Affairs Ministry. The system of the three-tier Panchayati Raj had the twin objective of planning development activities from the grassroots and entrusting such plans to the local self-government for implementation. A twenty-six member Pradesh Advisory Council comprising representatives from the five Divisions of NEFA was also constituted.

NEFA became a Union Territory on January 20, 1972 under the North Eastern Areas (Re-organization) Act of 1971. Later on August 15, 1975 the Pradesh Council was converted into a Legislature and a five member Council of Ministers took office. The existing Chief Commissioner was upgraded to the status of a Lieutenant Governor. The Union Territory finally became a full-fledged State in December 1986.

In the present day Arunachal Pradesh, a large number of tribes and sub-tribes live amidst the wild beauty of the mountains, primeval forests and difficult terrains criss-crossed by countless streams. The total number of them is one hundred and ten, speaking different dialects—about seventy. None of these dialects had any script except

Khampti, which uses Shan script. The Philological Section of the research department of Arunachal Pradesh took up the job of preparing the language guides for various dialects mostly for officials serving in the area. The scholars used three scripts — Roman, Nagri and Phonetic. The Monpas use Tibetan script for religious texts. From 1974 English was introduced as a medium of instruction. Hindi is the alternative medium of instruction. Nefamese, which is basically a form of broken Assamese and emerged as a lingua franca gradually faded out. All these tribes belong to the Southern Mongoloid stock and their dialects are linked to the North Himalayan group of Tibeto-Burman family, except Khamti, which belongs to the Thai group.

Arunchal Pradesh, the home of over 100 ethnic groups, is in a sense, a living museum of culture, language and ways of living. The Adis, one of the most important tribes of the State worshipped 'Donyi-polo' (Sun-Moon) as their traditional gods. The Monpas and the Sherdukpens in the Kameng region practise Buddhism and celebrate Losar and Tawang-Torjya festival. The Ibu-Mishmis living in the eastern most part of the State follow animistic beliefs. The Apatanis, known for their terrace cultivation celebrate their Dree festival in July for propitiation of their deities, good crops and welfare of the people.

The Adis cover the whole area of Siang District, the eastern half of the Subansiri and the western part of Lohit. A number of scholars, including Verrier Elwin have studied their socio-political system and culture. The Adis are probably divided into two branches—Padam-Minyong and Galo. Pasi-padam, Minyong, Bori, Tangam, Ashing and Pangei belong the Padam group, while Ramo, Bokar, Pailbeo and Galo come under the Galo branch. The Adi society has the village, as the corner stone of their integrated socio-political system. The Kebang is probably the most important institution. Kebang controls all political, administrative and judicial matters of the village. This traditional system is rooted in their life style and culture. Though there is no unanimity about the origin of Kebang, it is believed that this traditional democratic system, in which all adult men are its natural members has been with them from the hoary past.

During the pre-British days, the Gams "who were like leaders of the society were the exponents and custodians of the traditional laws

and customs. With the passage of time, the institution has undergone a lot of changes. The institution of the Panchayati Raj has made several changes in the village leadership structure. The introduction of business is another new development, which has brought in changes in the democratic pattern of Government among the community.

The Apatanis generally live in the Apatani plateau in the lower Subansiri District. It is the only tribe practising indigenous wet rice settled cultivation in the northeast India. Like the other tribes the Apatanis do not have any written history of their past. In fact, a report of Police Officer visiting the Valley to investigate a murder case in 1897 is the first written report about the tribe. After 1950, a large number of documents and books, including that of Haimendorf have recorded life and culture of the Apatanis. They have a patrilineal system and a Council called 'Builyang' to run the affairs of the village, including settlement of disputes and enforcement of customary laws. With the introduction of Panchayati Raj in Arunachal Pradesh in 1967 and following the implementation of 73rd Constitutional Act 1992, the importance of the Builyang has come down. An important feature of the Apatanis is their self-sufficient agrarian economy and cultivation on irrigated terrace lands.

In religious matters, the local priest 'Nyibu' enjoys a high status and performs social and religious ceremonies. With the advent of Christianity, the importance of the priest, however, has somewhat come down. The Apatani society is in transition, and the indigenous social norms are also undergoing changes. With the passage of time, the social life, including their system of marriage on the principle of clan exogamy, is also under stress.

Another major tribe, the Nocte, inhabits the central parts of Tirap District. The village council of elders called 'Ngothun' headed by the village chief was the institution of village administration. In the past, the main function of the council included settlement of disputes. Now they also take up responsibility of developmental works. The society is passing through a transitional phase, with the extension of the Panchayati Raj system, education and mobility in the occupational pattern.

The 'Tagins', another major tribe are concentrated in the Upper Subansiri District. They live in an isolated condition, with some sort

of a village self government. Earlier the Tagins used to settle in the inaccessible areas on the hill tops. Now, the pattern of settlement has changed, with the extension of peace and security to them by the administrative machinery and they are scattered in the whole district. A great deal of change has come even in agricultural practices. Permanent cultivation is preferred and there is a marked enthusiasm in horticulture. They are now adopting modern methods of cultivation, and have already adopted a monetary system in place of the old barter economy.

The 'Singphos' are concentrated in Bordumsa and Miao areas in Tirap District and also in Lohit district, especially on the banks of Teang and Noa-Dihing rivers. They follow patrilocal residence, patrilineal descent and inheritance. They are a fine athletic race and practise Buddhism. They are also expert blacksmiths and make iron implements.

The 'Monpas' live in the West Kameng District and practise 'Mahayana' Buddhism. They are known for their terrace cultivation, carpet making and rearing of Yak and sheep. The Sherdukpen are a small tribe inhabiting East Kameng. Divided into two classes, the Thongs and the Gheos, they are good agriculturists and traders. They practise a religion, which is a mix of Buddhism and animistic religious beliefs.

The Mishimis are divided into three main groups, living in Lohit District. The Idus called Chulikatas, the Mijus or the Kamans and the Digarus or the Taraons. The Taraons are believed to have migrated to India from Myanmar, along with the Idus. They lived initially at Dibang Valley and later moved to the present habitat. The Taraon language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman group of languages.

The Khamptis live in the areas to the South of the Lohit District, with the Parasuram Kund in the northeast and Tirap District to the South. Buddhist in religion, they are good craftsmen, enterprising traders and agriculturists.

'Tangsa' is a common name for the tribes — Moklum, Lungchang, Yugli, Lungri, Havi, Moshong, Rundra, Takhak, Ponthai and Longphi. They generally practise Jhumming. Unlike the Wanchos or Noctes, Moklums do not practise wood-carving. Their womenfolk weave and make beautiful designs on cloths. They worship the supreme deity

and follow their traditional customs and believe in the forces of nature and the existence of the Spirits.

The Wanchos live mostly in the south western parts of the Tirap District. Following traditional practices, they wear decorative headgears and heavy strings of beads on ears, neck, arms and legs.

The Buddhists in Arunachal Pradesh belong to the two main schools — the Mahayana and the Hinayana. The Monpas and Sherdukpens in Kamang, the Khambas and the Mambas in Siang, the Zakhrings and Meyors in Lohit belong to the Mahayana or Vajrayana School. The Khamptis, Singphos and Chakmas of the Lohit-Tirap area follow the Hinayana or Theravada.

In Kameng, three Buddhist sects — Nyingmapa, Kargyupa and Gelugpa started thriving. But with the setting up of the Tawang Monastery, the largest in the Himalayan region and known as 'Tawang Gaden Namgyal Lhatse' (the Paradise of the Divine Site, chosen by a horse), the Gelugpa sect got the upper hand. The other two sects practically lost their hold. The Nyingmapa sect is still prevalent among some village priests.

The Tawang monastery was founded in 1681 AD at the height of 3500 meters above sea level. According to popular beliefs, the spread of Buddhism among the Monpas and the Sherdukpens is linked to the visit of the Buddhist monk Padmasambhava to those areas in the eighth century. Seven places in the Monpa areas, namely, Taktsang, Jiktsang, Baggajang, Kimne, Terma Bumgan, Bigha, Komefuk - around Tawang are mentioned in various legends. The Sherdukpens hold nine places hallowed by the visit of Padmasambhava. These are — Jambring, Khang Gisih, Flujima, Machulu, Chupit, Jakhung, Pemaloso, Chaksung and Shra-ha-noma.

It is difficult to establish the historicity of these legends. But the scholars are of the view that the Gelugpa sect consolidated its hold after the monastery was set up at Tawang. The popular legend has associated divinity with the entire plan to set up the monastery. Mera Lama who was concerned about the right choice of the site of the monastery came to a hill called Bramdongchung, on horseback. He went in a cave nearby for meditation leaving the horse outside. When he came out after meditation, he did not find the horse and following the hoof marks, he came to a place called Tana Mandkhang and found his horse. Considering it a divine direction, he immediately

selected the place as the site of his monastery and gave a name — Tawang; Ta means horse; Wang means chosen i.e., the place chosen by a horse. The people of the villages nearby came to the aid of Mera Lama in the construction of the monastery. The full name of the monastery is Twang Gah-Idan Namage Lhachah. Twang means the site chosen by a horse, Gah-Idan is paradise, Namage means for the good of all directions and Lhachah means celestial. The Twang Gompa is thus the celestial paradise of the site chosen by a horse and for the welfare of the people in all directions.

The monastery has its majestic presence with eight metre high statue of Lord Buddha, great rotating prayer wheels — 'tangkhas' and the prayer of the monks in the midst of light emanating from the butter-lamps.

Arunachal shows traces of sporadic efforts in Sanskritization. The archological site of Malinithan at Likabali in Siang, Akashiganga near Abongin Siang and the famous Parasuram Kund near Tezu, Lohit are some remarkable examples. The ruins of a stone temple and the icons of Siva and Parvati, reminiscent of Dakshinakalika of Tantrasara and the other images of Surya, Indra, Ganesa, Kartikeya and Durga have been discovered. The images with deft workmanship bear stylistic affinities with those of the Pala period. The Akashiganga has been associated with the myth of the fall of the dismembered head of Sati (Parvati).

As the legend goes, the sage Parasuram became free from the sin of matricide after a dip in the Kund. The axe that got stuck to his hand fell away. This is a place from where the Lohit river originated. Every year the Makar Sankranti festival is held here and thousands of pilgrims from different parts of the country visit this holy place.

Festivals are the mirrors of culture of the people—the prized possessions. Dance and music are their part and parcel. In all the five divisions, unique community spirit is found in the festivals. In Kameng, Khan, Huphu Khru or Nechi Dau and Loser festivals are the most important. The Khan festival is very popular among the Mijis of Kameng and celebrated after the harvest. It is an occasion for merriment, of songs and dances and the people offer prayers to the deities for peace and prosperity. The hallmark of this festival is sacrifice and community feast.

The Huphu Khru or Nechi Dau festival is also a post-harvest festival of the Akas. The main features of the festival include prayers for prosperity and welfare, sacrifices of animals and community feast. The Loser festival of the Monpas, is a New Year festival and is meant for new vigour and zeal for work in fields and at the looms. Another important feature is the reading of the Buddhist scriptures on the occasion.

In Subansiri, major festivals include Dree festival of the Apatanis, Nishi Nyokum festival of the Nishis and Boori Boot festival of the Miris. The Apatanis celebrate the Dree Festival in July for bumper crop and all round prosperity. Dances and songs are major part of the festival. On the festival day, the images of Doni, Tani and other deities are installed at the altar and they are worshipped with the help of the Head Priest. The Nishis celebrate Nishi Nyokum festival again to propitiate deities for a rich harvest in the month of August. At the festival ground, the devotees chant prayers followed by animal sacrifice for the deities, to invoke their blessings. Boori Boot is the festival of the Hill Miris and also the Tagins, Gallongs and Nishis. The deities are propitiated for welfare and a happy future of the people. The dance and animal sacrifice with the chanting of prayers by priests is an important feature of the festival.

In Siang, the Mopin festival of the Gallongs is the most popular festival. Here also propitiation of the deities for wealth and rich harvest is followed by jubilation and merriment. It is held during the Adi months of Lumi and Luki, corresponding to March-April. Solung is yet another colourful festival of the Adis, celebrated in July-August and the Kebang or the village council fixes the exact dates. Animal sacrifice, community feast and prayers for protection of the plants are important features of this festival.

The most popular dance of the Adis — Ponung is also organized during this festival, in which the Ponung dancers - girls ranging between 14-18 years of age take part. The Ponung dancers dance in a circle, around the Miri, who narrates the story of creation of the world, along with flora and fauna. This narration called 'abang' contains a lot of information on the Adi faith and philosophy.

'Reh' is probably the most popular festival observed by the Idus of Lohit. The deity for peace and prosperity is propitiated during the festival. The 'Igu' dance is performed during the festival by a group

of men, dressed in their traditional costumes and led by the priests in honour of the Goddess of the festival.

The 'Sangken' festival is the biggest festival of the Khamptis of Lohit. It is celebrated on the occasion of the New Year, when the image of Lord Buddha is worshipped and bathed ceremonially. People believe that 'Sangken' cleans the body and mind of the people and brings new hope.

The 'Tamladu' festival is the most popular festival of the 'Digaru Mishmis' of Lohit. It is celebrated in March every year. During the festival the God of Earth, 'Duyuya' and the God of Water, 'Bruyuya' are worshipped. Dances are part and parcel of the festival, where young boys and girls express joy in welcoming the New Year.

In 'Tirap', the Noctes celebrate the 'Loku' festival; the Tangsas, the Mol festival and the Wanchos, the Ojiyele festival. Loku is celebrated during October - November following transplantation of paddy in expectation of rich harvest. The famous 'Chalo' dance lends colour to the local festival, in which traditional culture and history of the Noctes are narrated with the accompanying dances and songs. The dance is performed by children, youths and maids, followed by community feast. Loku presents beautifully the lifestyle of the Noctes.

The 'Mol' festival is the most popular agricultural festival of the Tangsas. Prayers to the deity for prosperity and happiness accompany it. The festival is rounded up through a community hunting.

The 'Ojiyele' festival is also a popular agricultural festival held in March by the Wanchos. The dates for celebration are fixed with common consent by the villagers. The deities are propitiated in this festival, which is held for 6-12 days. Songs and dances are an integral part of this festival. After the festival is over the villagers go back to their fields for agricultural work.

Thus the people of the State have a rich cultural heritage of which dance is an integral part. The war dance and dances connected with agriculture and ways of living lend colour to their life styles. The dances started as a productive rite but gradually rose to the level of an art. The other set of dances prevalent among the Buddhist groups show a developed art with gorgeous dresses

and stylized masks. The non-Buddhist dances are part of the folk tradition.

The Nishis, Adis, Taginis, Apatanis and other tribal groups claim that they are descendants of Abotani and strong believers in the cult of Doniy-polo, the sun and moon gods.

A landmark event in the socio-cultural life of the people of Arunachal Pradesh is the enacting of the Arunachal Freedom of Religious Faith Act, 1978. The aim was to safeguard the indigenous faith and culture of various tribes and sub-tribes in the State. The need for this kind of legislation was first articulated in 1969 by the Agency Council of the then North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) through a unanimous resolution. The demand for a legal protection against conversion to other faiths alien to Arunachal Pradesh by 'force, fraud, inducement and allurement', gathered momentum. The first elected Assembly in its first session itself passed a resolution unanimously to this effect. The Territorial Assembly subsequently passed the Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Indigenous Faith Bill, 1978. The Bill with some minor modifications got the assent of the President of India.

This emphasis on the retention of tradition in the midst of the winds of change blowing over the State is part of the people's efforts towards assertion of their distinct identity.

The people of Arunachal continue to practise their own traditional beliefs. Their religion in short is generally marked by belief in a Supreme God. The forces of nature, they believe, shape their destiny. Spring time, which marks the beginning of the agricultural cycle, is normally chosen for festivities. They glorify the season and hold community feasts and rejoicing. The Adis, for example, perform Aren after jungle clearing and invoke Gods of the Sky and Earth. Mopin is held after sowing and then comes Solung for the welfare of the people. The God of Harvest, Mopin, is also worshiped. The Sherduktens observe Chhekar for good crop and welfare. The Khamptis and Singphos celebrate 'Sangken', all for peace and prosperity of the people.

The people of Arunachal Pradesh have progressed quite fast, and are no longer within the confines of a narrow mental horizon. Today, Haimendorf's classic description of the static and egalitarian

people no longer holds good. No doubt the traditional culture and heritage remains the core matter of their ways of living, but a new vitality has come in this indigenous and artistic folk tradition. The society is under transition with the impact of new ideas and technologies. The cultural heritage is being rejuvenated; their world view is also expanding very fast. Arunachal is very much within the Indian mainstream with all its multi-colour and spectacular land and the people.

A TALE OF TWO VALLEYS

KNOWN AS THE land of the blue hills and the green valley, Assam with a total area of 78,523 sq. kilometres and a population of 2,66,38,407 according to 2001 census is interspersed with majestic rivers and streams. The scenic beauty is unique as suggested by the very name of the State which is derived from 'Asoma', meaning unparalleled. According to another group of scholars the word Assam is a variation of the word Ahom, a Tai Mongoloid group ruling over Assam. The core of the northeastern region, it is bounded by the eastern Himalayas in the North and Arunachal Pradesh in the northeast, the Patkai ranges, Nagaland and Manipur in the east, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura in the south, Bangladesh and West Bengal in the west. It is connected with the rest of India by a narrow corridor in Siliguri. So the Brahmaputra valley, the Barak valley, the Karbi Anglong and the North Cachar Hills constitute the present Assam after the reorganization of the northeastern States in 1971-72.

It is a land of composite culture and people. The mighty Brahmaputra with its unbounded energy and dancing like the frenzied Siva playing. His Damaroo' has a deep impact on the life and culture of the people on both the banks. It is a 'bewitchingly beautiful country' with the Brahmaputra and the ranges of 'the blue mountains lines on its either banks'. The Brahmaputra originating in Tibet as Tsangpo comes down in deep gorges, takes a new name Dihong and flows towards Sadiya where the two other rivers Lohit and Dibang merge into it. The expanded river now with the name of Brahmaputra pierces through the heart of Assam past Dibrugarh, Tezpur, Guwahati, Pandu, Goalpara, Gauripur and Dhubri --- cities and towns of historic associations. There is an undying relationship between the river and the people. Various myths and historical memories are part of the Assamese psyche and the literature. It is not just a simple journey of a river through an undulating and splendid landscape but it also gives and records a spiritual history of man, a story of his 'origin, and

growth' striving and aspirations, hopes and despair. The Brahmaputra has become part and parcel of the life of the people and their composite culture:

'In every life have I searched for you,
In every life have I died for you.
To unravel the mystery that you are!
Now, again, I have found you here, where
Lalita and Dhanyashri meet
Brahmaputra.'

Assam was known as Pragjyotisha in the olden days. And subsequently it was referred to as Kamrupa in the mythologies and literature. In the ancient Indian literature Pragjyotisha and Kamrupa were associated with Lauhitya, Kamrupa and Kamakhya. There are also references to Kamrupa in the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* and Kalidas's *Reghuvansam*. Prior to the Ahoms a number of dynasties ruled Assam like the Salastambhas, the Varmans, and Devas. The most important Varmana king was Bhaskaravarman (594-650 AD) during whose reign Hiuen Tsang, the Chinese pilgrim came to Kamrupa and made references to different aspects of the life in Kamrupa during the time in his famous travelogue. The Salastambha rulers ruled Pragjyotisha during the period between the eighth and tenth centuries. A portion of Assam was also ruled by the Koch rulers from the early part of the sixteenth century to the early seventeenth century. The Ahoms, belonging to the Shan group of people entered Assam crossing the Patkai range and established control under Sukapha in 1228 AD. During the Ahom rule Assam enjoyed an almost uninterrupted power till 1826 when the Yandabo Treaty was signed by which the Burmese ceded the territory of Assam to the East India Company.

The Mughal armies, of course tried to invade Assam seventeen times but every time they were repulsed. The severest attack was carried out by the army of Mir Jumla. The famous Saraighat battle between the Mughals and the Ahoms where the Mughals were defeated is a landmark in the history of Assam. The heroic action of Lachit Barphukan, the General of the Ahom army in that battle symbolises the pride of the Assamese. Two important Ahom kings like Pratap Singha and Rudra Singha have been responsible for further consolidation of the Ahom reign in Assam.

Assam is considered to be the seat of Tantra. In Kamakhya the Yoni worship is still in vogue. Various non-Aryan religious beliefs like worship of tree, river and serpents were quite prevalent in the State. But the main movement in the sphere of literature, culture and religious tolerance and practices came in Assam with the advent of Sankardeva. A versatile genius Sankardeva (1449-1569) brought about the neo-Vaishnavite movement and gave a new dimension to the Assamese art, culture, dance and music. He was indeed the fountainhead of the Assamese culture. Drawing his inspiration primarily from the *Bhagavata*, he was himself a prolific writer of poetry, songs, plays and Kirtan. His Kirtan is a lyrical composition interwoven with the quintessential features of the cult of the Bhakti movement. His 'Kirtan-Ghosha' is an outstanding piece in Assamese literature. His contribution in 'Ankia-nat' (one act play) and Bargeet (Assamese devotional songs) are marked by philosophical content and superb expression.

Sankardeva set in motion a new pattern of growth in the composite Assamese culture bringing into its fold diverse strands of thought and distinct plural life patterns of the various sections of the people. He was, in fact the greatest architect of the Assamese socio-cultural renaissance. He interpreted the essential spiritual wisdom enshrined in the *Bhagavata* and the *Upanishads* in the simplest language. His message which is known as the *Bhagavati Nama Dharma* had a tremendous impact on the people in the region. His path was humane and free from pointless rituals. Sankardeva's compassionate approach, which was against all social evils like untouchability and the rigours of the caste system, gave a new dimension to the evolving Assamese society. He was also a great organiser and unifier. He founded a number of Satras and Namghars, which have a great role in the integration of different segments into a composite entity. The Satras are the socio-religious centres, while the Namghars in villages are basically a Complex with a prayer hall, cultural centre, a library and a place for social get-together. These are outstanding socio-cultural institutions, which create an abiding sense of unity among the people.

Another important personality of the Vaishnavite movement in Assam is Madhavdeva (1489-1596), a disciple of Sankardeva. His works like *Namghosha*, *Bhakti Ratnavali*, *Ramayana Adi-kanda* and *Vaisnava Kirtan* are outstanding contributions in the Assamese

literature and society. Assam has the distinction of having a prose literature as early as 1593 when Bhattadeva who is considered the father of Assamese prose translated the *Bhagavata Gita* in Assamese prose.

The most important contribution of Assam is the extension of the essential cultural features of 'Sanskritization'. The neo-Vaishnavism, emphasis on one God, caste liberalism and the tolerant nature of the synthesized thought give a distinctive flavour to the Assamese culture. The Vaishnavite Bhaona with its dance and music is a positive example of the composite culture. Bihu, the springtime festival has acquired the status of a cultural festival in which people from various castes and creeds can take part. Originally a fertility festival, it has absorbed various Sanskritic influences as well and with popular forms of dance and music it is now a symbol of Assamese renaissance.

The Brahmaputra and its tributaries and the Barak river, an important tributary of the Surma are responsible for the growth of a large number of historical towns and urban centres on their banks. Ethnically Assam's society is a mixed one, with the bulk of the population having traces of Indo-Mongoloid racial stocks. The process of absorption and assimilation of various tribal and non-tribal groups has created an inter-mixture. Even the Assamese caste system is liberal.

The Bodos are racially Mongoloids. S.K. Chatterjee has described them as Indo-Mongoloid (Kiratas) in his *Kirata-Janakriti*. Another scholar has included them in 'the Indo-Tibetan fold'. This group has had a close contact with other racial elements and has passed through a process of cultural assimilation and in some cases racial fusion. The Bodo language belongs to the Western branch of Baric Division of the Sino-Tibetan family. Some scholars have included it into the Assam Burma group of the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan family. The Bodo speaking people inhabit a large area stretching from Dhubri in the west to Sadiya in the east. The Bodo literature with a large component of oral literature, folk songs, folk tales, proverbs and ballads are available in Assamese, Devnagri and Roman scripts. The Bodo language in fact does not have a script of its own though there is a reference of Deodhaim script among the Kacharis. The Bodo language became the medium of instruction in the Bodo dominated primary schools of Kokrajhar areas in 1963.

The Bodo language has since been included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution.

The Bodo culture has contributed immensely to the growth of the composite Assamese culture. As Dr. Banikanta Kakati wrote, "The Bodos were the most powerful. They built up strong kingdoms and with varying fortunes and under various Tribal names - the Chutiyas, the Kacharis, the Koches etc., they held sway over one or another part of North-Eastern India during different historical times."

The Bodo people, both the western and eastern branches had their royal establishments. The western branch, the Kacharis, had their strongholds in Bijni and Darrang areas, while the eastern branch, the Chutiyas had their Kingdom with its capital near Sadiya. Initially the Chutiyas had conflicts with the Ahoms, who had been ruling Assam from 1228 AD.

The different aspects of the Bodo culture have formed part of the Assamese culture, with various aspects of folklore, music, festivals and religious cults merged into it. The Bodos of the northern banks of the Brahmaputra worshipped Bathou, the Supreme God of the Bodos. He is known as Sibrai. Sibrai and his wife, Siburoi is believed to have created the universe and also the first man called 'Monsinsin', Darimoba and Siring to perpetuate the human race. The Sizu plant, the first tree was also created.

The Bodo religious practices cannot be described as animistic. In olden times, the Bodos had five main gods and goddesses —Ailong (the god of earth), Agrang (the god of water), Khoila (the god of air), Sanja Borli (the goddess of light) and Raj Khungri (the goddess of sky). The Bodos have no temple or a particular place of worship and generally an altar is made at a suitable place by the intending worshippers. The altar is divided into three parts. In the first part, a piece of cloth is kept which is symbolic of the formless existence of the Obonglaoree, the infinite God. In the middle part, a Sizu tree is planted which is symbolic of Bathou. Under the Sijou tree, a sacred earthen lamp is lighted. From the middle part of the altar, some rows of Khangla are planted and the Goddess of crops, Maimao is installed. This part of the altar symbolizes the Mother Earth.

The Bathou Borai, also known as Kharia Borai or Khuria Borai is the Chief of the Bodo Gods. Kehrai is the greatest religious festival

of the Bodos. The Kherai worship indicates a holy link between the God of Heaven and the human beings of the Earth.

The Bodo prayer to Bathou which is indicated in the Mantras used during the worship indicates the Bodo view of man and the Creator:

“O God, our father, protect your ignorant children, you are the creator, preserver and destroyer all in one, you are peerless, the altar of Bathou has five bamboo rings, the Sijou plant has five edges, so the Bodos have five principles, we plant the Sijou on the altar and light the flame of oil and worship you, whilst, drums, flutes and cymbals play, oh father be merciful, have mercy on your Bodo sons, steeped in darkness of ignorance, light us father from darkness, lift us to light from Heaven father, shower blessings on us”.

The Kachari Buranji speaks of Siba as the origin of the Kings. The Bodo social structure is patrilineal. The Bodos have preserved, what the scholars have described the five modified characteristics of the Mongoloid (Kirata) group of people. The habit of betel-chewing, aversion to milk as a food item, simple loom for weaving cloth, a type of shield used in war, changing residence with primitive form of agriculture, as W.C. Smith said, have been preserved by the Bodos as part of their modified customs. The Bodos celebrate festivals, which have enriched the composite culture of the State. The Baishagu, Domachi, Kherai and Maroi have added colour to the festivals of Assam. The Baishagu is basically a New Year festival, marking the end of the old year and the beginning of the new. The process of fusion and integration through cultural exchange is a continuous one, particularly in a region where there has been a confluence of different cultures and races — the Austrics, the Mongoloids and the Dravidians in particular. The Bodos have an agrarian economy and their beliefs, festivals, dances and songs are part of the agricultural ambience.

The Rabhas are a branch of the Bodo group of people, mostly spread over Kamrup, Goalpara and Darrang areas. The tribe is divided into various sections like Pati, Rongdani, Maitori, Dahari, Bitilia, Chunga and Kocha. The Rabhas once had matrilineal social structure. But their society has undergone change with the impact of the neighbouring patrilineal communities. The Rabhas practise settled cultivation. The Pati Rabhas are considered to be the most acculturated and more akin to the Assamese Hindus.

The Pati Rabhas propitiate many deities and evil spirits. Langa is the god of the Pati Rabhas and commonly known as Langa Thakur. Langa is worshipped on the Assamese New Year's day. There is no idol for this deity. Normally the Pati Rabha villagers clear the jungle and select a place, which is sanctified with cowdung and water. There may also be a permanent worshipping place called Langa-than with several stones in upright position. The worship is performed by the Deuri, the priest for the welfare of the men, crops and the animals. The Pati Rabhas believe in invisible powers and perform Nichan Puja in the months of May-June through which they drive away the evil spirits from the village.

The Rongdani Rabha is another important section of the Rabhas. The traditional village council governs their society. This council has a four-tier system with song (village), mandal (unit), jamad (zone) and Sanmilan (association). The village is headed by the mandal (headman) and it discharges functions relating to property disputes, marriage rituals and work relating to governance of the village.

The Rongdhani has come under the influence of the Hindu society. They have almost discarded the matrilineal system and gradually moved to the patrilineal pattern in respect of residence, marriage, inheritance and succession.

The Dimasa Kachari belonging to the Bodo group of people of the Tibeto-Burman race is mainly confined to North Cachar Hills. Small portions of them also inhabit Cachar and Karbi Anglong. The etymology of the term 'Dimasa Kachari' is interesting. Many scholars have given different opinions. Risley wrote that the tract between the Brahmaputra and the Kosi was known as Kachar and it is likely that the tribes or the people inhabiting that area might legitimately be called Kacharis or Khasaris. The Kacharis do not call themselves Kacharis. The outsiders used this term to describe these tribal communities. Gait ruled out the possibility of deriving the term Kachari from their association with Cachar. The Kacharis living in the Brahmaputra valley far away from Cachar are also known by that name. Moreover, they were so called before they settled down in Cachar. There is also a view that the word Kachari has relation with the term Koch or Koss. The term Kachari might be a corrupted form of Koss-ari. This view is also disputed.

Coming to the term Dimasa, the Kacharis call themselves Bodo

or Bodofisa in the Brahmaputra valley, while in the North Cachar Hills they are known as Dimasa or Dimafisa. In Cachar they are called Barmans. The term literally means children or descendants of a big river 'Di' means water, 'Ma' is big and 'Sa' means children. In that case Dimasa means the children of Brahmaputra. There is a view that the Dimasas were known as Bodofisa before they settled in Dimapur. After they migrated to the bank of Dhansiri, they came to be known as Dimasa.

Despite the absence of unanimity regarding the etymology of the term Dimasa Kachari, it is fairly established that the Kacharis must have lived on the banks of the Brahmaputra before the advent of the Ahoms. In the thirteenth century the Dimasa kingdom extended along the south bank of Brahmaputra from Dikhu to Kallang and included the valley of Dhansiri and the North Cachar Hills. The hostilities between the Ahom and the Dimasa began towards the end of the fifteenth century and with the growing power of the Ahoms the Dimasas were thrown back to the banks of Dhansiri river.

The Kachari Buranji, numismatic, epigraphic and other historical evidence have recorded many details, which help in reconstructing the chronology of the Dimasa Rajas. The first major Dimasa Raja, Khorapha is believed to have reigned from 1502 to 1526. This is called the ruling dynasty of Cachar or Heramba Rajya. This was brought under the British control in 1830 after the assassination of Raja Govindachandranarayana who is recorded to have ruled from 1813 to 1830.

There is a small group under the Dimasa—the Semsas who live in Semkhor village in North Cachar Hills in relative isolation. The Semsas maintain village endogamy and the non-Semsa section of the Dimasa keeps social distance from them. Semkhor village is situated on the high hills of Barail range and about thirty kilometres away from the nearest Railway Station and marketing centre, Maibong. The Semsas practise jhum cultivation. Their social structure is based on a double bilineal descent system. A semsa man belongs to his father's patriclan and mother's matriclan. Similarly a Semsa woman belongs to her mother's matriclan and father's patriclan. This double clan allegiance and the practice of village endogamy are the essential social features of this isolated community.

The Karbis, another important tribe, belongs to the Mongolian race and yet show traces of the Austric and Aryan elements in their culture. They live both in the hills and the plains spread over a large area. The Austric influence is found on the Karbi religious beliefs, rites and language. The practice of ancestor worship, planting of memorial stones and certain linguistic affinity between the Khasi and Karbi languages are some of the interesting examples.

The mythological king and the founder of the Kamakhya temple encouraged the migration of Brahmins to his kingdom to spread the Vedic rites and religious practices. A number of historians are of the view that the kings of the Varman and Pala dynasties contributed a lot towards the dissemination of Hindu rituals and practices. The Karbi literature has been deeply influenced by the so-called Aryan ideas. Lakhmi Keplang, a traditional Karbi song composed in connection with the paddy cultivation has absorbed the associations of Goddess Lakshmi. Chabin Alun, a traditional song of the karbis narrates the story of the *Ramayana*. The historians say that the Karbi Ramayana tradition has entered the Karbi society during the fifteenth century and the early part of the sixteenth century.

The anthropologists have noticed two distinct sub-groups among the Amri Karbis--those who live in the southeastern part of Kamrup and those living in the northern hill tracts of Ri Bhoi areas in Khasi Hills. The former group has adopted among other things worship of Siva, Parvati, Lakshmi and Saraswati, while the other group has absorbed influences of the Khasis in matters of dialect and costumes. In the hills of Karbi Anglong, there is also some influence of Christianity and it is bound to have deep impact on education and modernization of the people.

The Mishings are another important tribe mostly inhabiting Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh, Darrang and Sibsagar. They belong to the Tibeto-Burman group and have close affinity with the Adis of Arunachal in matters of language and culture. Once the inhabitants of the hills they came down to the plains.

The Mishings have been living in the midst of the non-Mishing population and as a result have absorbed a lot of influences in their social and religious practices. Their religious system is based on beliefs in supernaturalism and associated practices. According to their belief, Sedi Babu and Melo Nane -- the first father and mother,

created the universe. Out of them Abatoni was born and thereafter Donyi and Polo — the sun and the moon were born. The Mishings are believed to be the descendants of Donyi and Polo. They do not have an exclusive festival or worship dedicated to Donyi Polo. They are however invoked in all their ritualistic functions.

The Mishings believe in spirits, who are generally hostile to human beings and live everywhere. Therefore ritualistic offerings are made to propitiate them. Mibos who act as priests initiate the ritual functions of the Mishings.

As part of the process of acculturation some Mishings have come under the influence of the Bhakatiya cult, which is a mixture of the Mishing beliefs and the neo-Vaishnavism and Tantricism. In satras religious verses of Kirtana and Punthis written by Sankardeva and Madhavdeva are recited by the Bhaktas. The Bhakatiya system has brought another religious format called Borsewa, which is performed in 'Namghar'. The Bhaktas gather in the 'Namghar' in the evening and sing ritual songs and dance for the welfare of the people of the village. The Mishing ritualistic functions, whether traditional or modern are held in a congregation. They take the colour of social events where the whole village take and seek blessings of different spirits for peace and welfare.

There are some Buddhist groups in Assam like the Aitonias belonging to the Thai race. They are a peasant community and have maintained their distinct language, customs and traditions. Also known as Shyams, they are spread in Titabor, Barpathar and Sarupathar areas of Jorhat and Bhiton, Balipathar, Silonijan and Kaliani in Karbi Anglong. The Aitonias are primarily wet rice cultivators. The village organisation is headed by Gaonbura and matters pertaining to festivals, property disputes and various public matters are decided by the village councils. The religious matters are handled by the monks. The Aitonias follow the Hinayana school of Buddhism. The village monastery known as Bouddha Vihar is located in the middle of the village. The Aitonias hold many festivals and ceremonies throughout the year for the welfare of the people of the village.

Another small ethnic group, the Turungs live in some villages in Sibsagar. They are an allied section of the Singpoi living near Turung-Pani River in Eastern Assam. This group of the Tibeto-

Burman branch of the Mongoloid stock follow Buddhism. The village affairs are handled by village council headed by a Gaonbura, while religious matters are taken care of by monks. The Turungs follow clan exogamy in marriage and generally prefer monogamy.

Thus, in Assam there are more tribal groups than the Scheduled Castes. The Scheduled Caste population in Assam constitutes only 6.2 per cent of the State's total population. The list of the Scheduled Castes indicates that the Barak valley has got as many as thirteen caste groups, while the Brahmaputra valley seven only. Some castes are, however, common to both the valleys and the total number of Scheduled Castes in Assam is only sixteen. Out of them only three castes — Namasudras, Kaibartas and Patnis form over seventy-four per cent of the total Scheduled Caste population in the State. These people live in Assam in scattered areas interspersed with the general population.

The Ahoms, a branch of the Shan group of people in Burma (Myanmar) has ruled Assam for over 600 years till 1826. The Ahom Kings were the pioneers in introducing the annals of contemporary events, which are known as Buranji. Generally the scribes were the priests and so the annals written by them have got an aura of religious sanctity. The Buranji was given a lot of importance by the Ahoms and a recitation of it formed part of the Ahom marriage ceremony. The direction of Siu-Ka-Pha, the first Ahom King in the 13th century was very clear — "to write down all particulars, and whenever an incident takes place, when a person dies, and when we acquire new followers". This remained the guiding principle for the Ahom annals and they were not always exclusively concerned with their kings and their activities alone. Even performance of religious ceremonies, information on floods, droughts, earthquakes, epidemics, the appearance of comets and the like are included in the annals. There is no name of the writer of the Buranjis. To make the character of the annals impersonal, there was economy of words. So the Ahom Buranjis have the contemporary flavour, the chronological order of events, absence of value judgments of the scribes, the terse style of writing, the absence of the scribes' name and also future prognostication. From these Buranjis, valuable information on the Ahoms is available.

The Ahoms merged themselves into the area and culture of the land of Assam. They devoted all their energy to organize the tribes

and the groups of people living in the region. Their fight with the imperial Moghuls and the splendid victory by mobilizing the people of the Brahmaputra valley is an absorbing piece of Assamese history. Gradually they extended westward. Their control over the land for such a long period is attributable to their policies of respecting rites and practices of the communities controlled by them. They evolved an administrative structure, which consisted of Paik or Khel with officers like Phukans, Rajkhowa and Baruahs and maintained the stability in the Kingdom by following a policy based on social justice and a rational approach. They had no written code of law and they decided the cases according to the customs and the standards of right and wrong. In the villages, the village council or Raj Mels presided over by village headman or Gaon-bura. If the case is not settled in the village council, it is referred to the head of the Khel, who normally disposes it off. The autonomy of the village community was never threatened by the State. The judicial functions were discharged by the Ahom Kings on the basis of fair play without offending conventions of the smaller societies.

After the advent of the British rule, the Ahoms who lost power gradually tried to unite themselves to bring about solidarity among themselves, with ethnicity, language and religion becoming the core points of their emerging identity. The Tai language and Mongoloid roots became the chief motivating force for the solidarity of the group. Over a period of time, ethnicity and the idea of the Ahom solidarity became manifest.

Assam, thus located at 'one of the great migration routes of mankind', has evolved a culture with waves of people of diverse racial origin belonging to Negrito, Austro-Asiatic, Mongoloid, Tibeto-Burman and partly Aryan linguistic groups. It is one of the few regions which is almost a 'federal hall where the most ancient and the most modern, the antiquated and the most up-to-date are found to meet together'. Songs and dances in Assam have not merely been part of the folk tradition, but also traced to a divine origin. The folk songs and dance forms have a religious purpose and begin with an invocation to various deities. Music and instruments are considered to be a gift from the heaven. The myths speak of Adi Niranjan, who has created Prakriti and who in turn was responsible for the birth of Brahma. From the pores of Brahma's hair emanated the Earth; thereafter followed flora and fauna. The musical instruments like,

Vin, Pepa, Dhol, Khol, Mridang, Tal, Vanhi, Tabla, Khanjari, Dholok, Muruli, Dhak, Sutuli and the like are in fact the instruments of the Gandharvas, which came down to earth. The Assamese ballads invoke divinities like Saraswati, the Goddess of Learning. The Bihu-Geet, the Huchari, the Oja-Pali are believed to have a divine origin.

The Karbi myth of Rangsinā has also ascribed music and dances, be they in spring or in harvest time, to a divine source. After the creation, God decided to take rest and He summoned Rangsinā, who is the master of heavenly music and told him to go down to Earth and spread the message of the mystery of the creation in the shape of music so that the people can find God through songs. Accordingly, Rangsinā came down to the earth and started living on the banks of Telehar river in Mikir Hills. He took the shape of two orphan boys with the names Mir and Jeng. Mir and Jeng sang during the harvesting ceremony of the Karbis in praise of the creation of the earth. Rangsinā reared two local brothers, Bedu and Langbi who were brought into the cottage and taught the songs by him. They were asked to teach the same to the people from one end to the other of the Karbi land. The motive of the Creator in sending down the God of music to the Earth and teaching the songs to mankind indicates the divine aspect of culture --- both music and dance. The Karbis begin their programmes with an invocation to the divine source -- Rangsinā:

‘Oh grand-children, this song goes like this in accordance with the seeds of music planted by the respected Rangsinā...’

The folk songs of the Bihu-Geet variety, sung on the occasion of Bihu, the spring festival, express the beliefs and the psychology of the people in Upper Assam quite effectively. God is considered to be the source of these songs and also the spirit of love as expressed below:

‘It was God, who planted the seedlings of songs,
It was Brahma, who tended them,
Forgive me, people, if an unbecoming song comes out,
First I sing of love.

First God created the world,
He also created the creatures,
The same God made love,
Why don't we?’

The Bihu is also associated with Husari institution, in which people in the village move about singing songs, which are attributed to Bathou or Siva. The Bihu is in fact the national festival of Assam, which is held at the advent of spring and the beginning of the New Year. The Bihu dance forms part of this festival, in which people, young and old take out procession on the day of Chaitra Sankranti, soliciting blessings for the New Year. Husari - the devotional songs are sung, which is followed by the Bihu dance. This process continues generally for seven days to the accompaniment of Dhol and Pepa. With the passage of time, the dance has undergone changes. The ancient practice of Bihu by young girls in nearby forests has been discarded.

The Bihu is a festival of merriment. Originally a complex of folk rituals, the festival has accommodated many traits from the Austrics, Mongoloid and Aryan strands of culture. During the festival, young men and women attired in their best dresses perform dances with Bihu songs, by the tribal people of the plains as well along with their non-tribal brethren. The songs and dances associated with the Bihu festival have found a fresh lease of life in the context of a cultural and aesthetic revival in the Assamese society.

The Oja Pali dancers have a tradition of at least five centuries. They entertain the folk with music, dance and recitation of *Mahabharata* and the Puranic episodes. The Oja is the leader, while the Diana Pali, is the chief assistant and three or four palis are the supporting assistants helping the leader Oja. The dance form uses Angika (gestures), Vachika (words or songs), Aharya (costumes) and Satvika (manifestation of the psychological state), supported by Laya and Tala. The Oja Pali dance is part of the folk institution, which is normally held during a religious function. The Oja offers musical prayers to his five Gods and Goddesses — Ganesha, Siva, Goddess Bhavani, Krishna and Gandharva.

The Oja Palis not only recite religious verses, but also give a religious tone to the entire performance through their music. A verse recorded from Palasbari near Guwahati exemplifies the divine character of the tradition:

‘...Thus was made the Sabha by
Dharma’s son King Yudhisthira;
Chitrasen, Chitrarath, and other Gandharvas,

They came and arranged the assembly.
 Malava and Malavi ragas they sang variously—
 The Vidyadharas and Vidyadharis
 Apsaras like Urvashi started dancing
 And people had their eyeful.
 Therefore, among mankind, plant banana posts,
 Put bamboos over them as beams,
 Whoever speaks ill coming to such an assembly
 They all speed to hell.
 Instrument, song, rhythm - those who condemn,
 Declares Dharma's son,
 Are tortured by Yama and destroyed by great sin.'

After the Neo Vaishnavait movement led by Shri Sankardeva, the Oja Pali dance became popular with the themes of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*.

The Satriya dance has been introduced by Shri Sankardeva, Shri Madhavadeva and Shri Damodardeva. It is one of the most powerful dance forms of Assam containing both Nritya and Nritta. Nritta is an abstract dance, with movements and expressions without any dramatic content, while Nritya is a dance with dramatic representation, with movement and gestures invested with meaning. There are different styles in this school of dance like Kamalabari style and Dakshinpat style. Most of the Satriya dances are vigorous and generally the male dancers take part in this dance. Majuli, considered the biggest river island, is called the Land of Satras and at least 22 Satras are still active in this river island. Auniati Satra, Dakshinpat Satra, Garamur Satra, Kamalabari Satra, Bhogpur Satra and Bengena-ati Satra are the main Satras of Majuli.

The Bodo dances can be classified into four groups - Kherai, Habajanai, Bagarumba and Baisakhu. The Kherai dances are organized to propitiate different deities. The Habajanai is related with marriage. Bagarumba is associated with merry making, while Baisakhu is held as part of the harvest festival and celebration of the New Year.

Bagarumba is considered to be the most attractive dance form of the four. The dancers attired in best dresses and hand woven colour scarf, move in rhythm with brisk footwork. Beginning in horizontal lines, it takes a circular pattern with rising tempo.

The Mishings or the Miris, are mostly settled on the river banks with agriculture and weaving as their primary occupations. They have several dance forms like Chelloya, Chipak Arik, Arik-Inam, Ai-Nitam and Ali-Ai-Ligang. The Karbis have also a dance tradition. Chomangkan is an important dance of the tribe. The other tribes — Dimacha-Kachari, Kuki, Zeminaga, Rabhas have also folk dances associated with various festive and religious occasions.

The District of Goalpara has a rich tradition of dance and music. Dances like Kushan, Bansh, Kati Nritya, Hudum Nritya, and Diya Nritya are some of the popular dances of the people in the area.

The continuous reign for about six hundred years by the Ahoms gave stability for consolidation of the regime and development of a sense of pride. This was reflected in many battles fought between the Ahoms and the Moghuls. Pandit Nehru said while inaugurating the Saraighat Bridge on the Brahmaputra, “the final battle took place at this very site where the Assamese fought bravely on boats. This is a glorious chapter in the history of Assam. ... This will remind you of the glorious event of the history of Assam and inspire you to bravely resist any aggressor with full preparation.”

Guwahati was the seat of the Ahom Kings' Viceroy to govern the western part of the Kingdom and over a period of time, it became the centre of commerce and administration. Situated between the foot of Kamakhya Hill, the Bharalu Stream, the Chalabeel (water body) and Kharguli with the Brahmaputra touching from the east to the west, the city had a unique position with fortified entrances. The British gave another dimension to the city as a centre of learning, with setting up of a number of educational institutions. After Independence, the city expanded with a new university, High Court and a number of other institutions.

Assam is now at the cross roads of history. There is a perception of a crisis of a socio-economic, cultural and political identity in the face of continuous migration from outside. The Assam movement between 1979-85 against foreign nationals was primarily an assertion of the Asamiya identity against a perceived threat of being marginalized demographically in their homeland. The problem of Assam is one of socio-cultural identity. It is a melting pot where, churning of numerous forces, people and communities creates turbulence, which needs to be resolved and stabilized.

Assam is called a rich land with poverty-stricken people. There is tremendous potential in terms of natural and human resources in various spheres of development. But there is gap in performance. With adequate entrepreneurial ability and mobilization of all potential resources, it can emerge as one of the major agricultural and industrial regions of India.

THE LAND OF JEWEL

PANDIT NEHRU ONCE described it as a 'Jewel of India'. Manipur is indeed a land of majestic landscape with vast fields, and the hills surrounding the valley at the centre. Bounded on the north by Nagaland, on the south by Mizoram, on the west by Assam and on the east by Myanmar it has maintained its link with the Indian ethos and culture despite its isolation and remoteness. The capital town, a flower on lofty heights is named after the Imphal river and the smaller rivers in the valley like Irial, Thoubal and Nambul lend unique beauty to this easternmost state.

Before independence Manipur was a native State with a monarch assisted by a council of Advisors, Durbar. The history of the Manipur kingdom can be traced back at least to the thirteenth century and from available records it has been found that by 1714 A.D., one hundred forty seven kings have ruled the area. The story of Panheiba, a Naga Chief who became famous as Garib Nawaz is fairly well known. But the Manipuri kings had been recorded to be oscillating between the Burmese kings on the one hand and the British on the other. The case of Jai Singh is pertinent. He held negotiations with the British in 1762. But they backed out and in 1765 when the Burmese invasion took place, he had to flee to Cachar. Later he sought help from the Ahom King and with his help Jai Singh got restored. During the next fourteen years he was dethroned four times. Finally he had to come to terms with the Burmese to retain his control over the throne. The fate of three sons of Jai Singh is no less interesting and their internecine quarrels kept the Manipur situation quite unstable. The British were gradually emerging as a force to reckon with in India's northeast. The British troops came in confrontation with the Burmese. In Manipur Jai Singh's son, Gambhir Singh was restored to the kingdom in 1826. His infant son Chandra Kirti Singh with his uncle Narsingh as a regent succeeded him. Later Narsingh replaced Chandra Kirti Singh through a conspiracy. His brother Devendra Singh succeeded Narsingh in 1850.

Subsequently Chandra Kirti was able to get back his control of the kingdom through well laid out strategy. The British recognized him in 1851.

The signing of the Yandaboo Treaty between the British and the Burmese king in 1826 had raised hopes of stability and an end to the frequent conflict in the region. But the hope was short-lived. In fact, the numerous conflicts between various forces were practically the order of the day in the coming one hundred years. In Manipur, there was a strong dispute on the issue of succession in 1890 and General Tikendrajit fought against the British. A military expedition by the British curbed the conflict with an iron hand.

Following an agreement between the Manipur King and the British government in 1907, a Political Agent of the Governor of Assam was to preside over the Durbar. After the Second World War, people of Manipur demanded for what they called a 'responsible government'. A Constitution making body of seventeen members, twelve of them elected, was constituted. The body submitted their recommendations, which led to the Government of Manipur Act of 1947. This Act stipulated the formation of a Legislature and a Ministry of six elected members to be headed by a nominee of the Manipur Maharaja. Meanwhile, the most important event happened - the Independence of India, and after some time the Manipur Maharaja signed the Instrument of Accession on September 21, 1948. Manipur later became a Part C State of the Indian Union. The President appointed a Council of Advisers to assist the Dominion Agent and subsequently the Chief Commissioner of the State. Manipur continued to be a centrally administered territory and was given some measure of local self-government under the provisions of the Territorial Councils Act of 1956. Subsequently in 1963, Manipur was allowed to have an elected Legislature under the Government of Union Territories Act.

To fulfill the aspirations of the people and in recognition of the 'strength of feeling behind these aspirations', the government of India decided to grant full Statehood in 1970 in principle. But it took some time to work out the details keeping in view what the Minister of State for Home said, a 'co-ordinated approach to the problem of development and security of the northeastern region'. The full Statehood status was finally accorded on January 20, 1972 with six

District Councils in its hill areas to deal with matters of local development and customary practices.

One peculiar feature of the State is that hills constitute almost ninety per cent of the total area of 22,356 Sq. Kms. But almost two thirds of the total population of 23,88,634 (according to the 2001 census) live in the central valley. The Meiteis live in the Manipur central district, while the hill districts are inhabited by as many as 29 tribes who broadly belong to the Naga group and the Kuki group. The Naga group includes Tangkhul, Mao and Kabui, while the Kuki group includes Hmar, Paite, Thadoil, Vaiphei and Zou.

The Meiteis (Meitrabak) belong to the Mongoloid group of people and the language - Manipuri or Meitei belongs to the Tibeto-Burman group of languages. The Meiteis in the valley were exposed to a wide variety of influences. The Brahmins came from different parts of India and merged into the Manipuri society. The Burmese, Shans, Tais and other strands of people came and formed the composite racial group of the Meiteis. The Vaishnavite culture or the neo-Vaishnava renaissance moulded the Meitei society and structure radically. The 'rasaleela' and thousands of 'Natya Mandaps' emerged in the villages of the valley with far-reaching influence. This process of what may be called 'Sanskritization' began by the fifteenth century and reached its peak in the eighteenth century during the reign of Bhagyachandra (1763-1798).

The interesting feature of the Meiteis is the cultural synthesis between the Vaishnavite and the local Manipuri traditions. The Manipuris have not forgotten their pre-Vaishnavite gods and goddesses whom they worship in festivals known as Lal Haraoba. In fact the process of 'Sanskritization' evolved in the Meitei society through identification and synthesis. The indigenous gods and goddesses were identified with their Hindu counterparts. The King of Heaven, Soraren was identified with Indra, Panthoibi with Durga, Wangbren with Varuna and so on. It has been found that Saivism and the Tantric Cults were prevalent during the ancient period of the history of Manipur. They were so deeply embedded that the Bhakti cult could not throw away their belief in Lord Siva and the Goddess Durga. The Manipuris hold festivals in various seasons. Lai Haraoba or the festivity of the gods is normally organised between the spring and the rainy season. Although these are meant for ancient deities, the Vaishnavites openly participate in the festival.

This kind of duality is noted in the harmonious blending of the Dussera and the traditional ritual, Kwakjalra. This is celebrated on the last day of the Durga Puja. In the old days there was a ritual of reading the future of the kingdom from flights of scared crows. Now on the last day of the Durga Puja, Ravana's effigy is shot at and people read the future from the spots hit by the shots. The fusion of the folk elements with the rituals and the practices of the more organised religion is an important feature of the Meitei society.

This spirit of amalgamation was also extended to the people of the hills. Raja Jai Singh made efforts to integrate them into the body politic of Manipur. He was known as Chingthang Komba or one who embraces the hills. He is believed to have taken a vow that he would not visit his ancestral village before he achieves total integration of the hills and the plains. The mutual influences between the people of the valley and the tribes in the hills are seen in the social and cultural sphere. The developed choreograph, deft movement of hands and feet and colourful costumes of the Kabui dancers and the striking similarities between the Tangkhul dances and the Manipuri dances bear eloquent testimony to this trend of a composite development.

As already noted the hill areas of Manipur are inhabited by twenty nine tribes. Christianity entered the hills of Manipur in the later part of the nineteenth century. The American Baptist Missionaries were behind spread of education and opened schools simultaneously with the proselytization work. Over ninety percent of the Tangkhuls are Christians with many sects. After Independence in 1947 and the subsequent merger of Manipur with the Indian Union, tremendous changes were brought about in the social, economic and political life of the people in the hills.

The impact of Christianity was felt during the reign of Chura Chand Singh who became Maharaja after the Manipur Uprising of 1891. The American Baptist Mission and the North East India General Mission or the Thado-Kuki Pioneer Mission and their various offshoots worked in the hill areas vigorously. These efforts generated a new identity and consciousness among the hill people. The exploitative activities of the village Chiefs, the practice of forced labour and the like, were questioned by the emerging conscious segments of the tribal people.

This tribal elite became conscious of their rights and opportunities. The emergence of the democratic institutions strengthened this articulate and effective political elite who used politics as a principal method of searching for a solution to many of their problems. The Kuki National Assembly (KNA) was formed in 1947 with ethnic overtones as a political unit of the Kukis, that is, Thadous, Paites, Vaipheis, Gangtes, Simtes and the like. Many splinter groups like Hmar Congress, the Paite National Council, the Gangte Tribal Union and the Hmar National Union emerged from the parent KNA.

Manipur is a classic example of the process of cultural and religious integration. Both the strands of Vaishnavism and the ancient way of worship went on side by side. Even the Vaishnava kings used to keep the department for 'Maiba' and 'Maibi', i.e. the ancient priests and priestesses. They were sent to various villages for worship of the local gods and goddesses. The entire village used to take part on those occasions. This racial consciousness is the hallmark of the Manipuri way of living. The indigenous 'Cheiraoba' festival on the Meitei New Year's Day is a significant example of the kind. It is a day when every family worships the family god and all the rituals of this festival centre round the family. The celebration shows a close relationship between religions and other spheres of social life. The Vaishnavite Manipuris thus retain something of their previous customs — worship of the household deities like 'Sanamahi' and 'Laimaren', annual 'Lai-Haraoba' festivals before the forest deities or clan which number over three hundred, authority of the 'Piba', the lineage Chief and affiliation to seven clans or 'Salais'. The socio-cultural profile of the Meiteis shows two contradictory pulls and an amalgam of various strands of culture. The evolving culture of the Meiteir lies, as some writer put it, 'somewhere in the shadowy frontiers' between the broad Indian and the local eastern traditions. For example, there are people who refuse to accept any influence of the mainstream Indian or classical dance, while another group of enthusiasts favour superimposition of everything of the Natya Shastra tradition. The Manipuri Devdasi dance is a case in point. When a Maibi, a Manipuri Devdasi unfolds her hand into either an 'ardha chandra' or 'Hamsasya Hasta' poses against the background of 'Pena Music', or leaps briskly with a 'Musti Hasta' pose indicating Lord Shiva, one may clearly see the impact of the Natya Shastra tradition. But when one sees her eyes, dreamy, half-closed with slow

and subdued movements, she is definitely going beyond the provisions of the Natya Shatra.' 'She is doing her distinctive 'abhinaya' all the same'.

Manipur known for its dance, theatre, cinema and sports has taken its excellence beyond its boundaries. Ratan Thiyam's Chorus Repertory Theatre, which was set up on April 1, 1976 has already made a mark in the arena as an institution of Theatre studies and experimentations. Its playhouse, 'The Shrine' is the scene of many theatre festivals and symposia on drama and dramaturgy. The plays staged here are not always on traditional Manipuri forms alone. Theatre being a composite art and the actors being vehicles for statement, they are trained in dance, acting, martial arts, stagecraft and designs in various traditional Manipuri forms and other methods developed over time. Ratan Thiyam's theatre is an experiment to be "a bridge between eastern and western theatre", utilizing the tradition as a re-interactive tool. Ratan Thiyam has made a significant contribution not merely in production, training and designing and the process of play writing, but also making of the right audience. 'The Shrine', a two hundred seater theatre is indeed a unique contribution of the artistic genius of Manipur.

So there are forces that try to find out a common origin of the people of the hills and the valley of Manipur. Some groups in the valley discover their roots in the pre-Vaishnavite Meitei religion and call themselves the worshippers of 'Pakhangba', 'Sanamahi', and 'Apokpa' (forefathers). These revivalists advocate the use of the old Meitei script against the present Assamese-Bengali script for the Manipuri language. They also favour renaming of the land as 'Meitrabak' in place of Manipur. This search for ancient racial roots shows a cleavage in the process of a cultural synthesis in the State.

In the hills two major forces — Christianity and Urbanization are at work and have changed the world-view and the socio-economic situation of the people. The increasing modernization and peasantization of the tribes of Manipur have brought about changes in their social and political outlook. Efforts towards integration of the people in the hills and the valley based on either common Mongoloid roots or common scripts are not the best way. The awareness of a common destiny and ethnic identity and memories of living together for centuries might be some factors only. But economic integration at the grassroots holds the key to the solution

of the Manipur problem and cultural dichotomy. In the ultimate analysis, doing away with the economic exploitation and the development initiatives for all the people in the valley and hills are absolutely essential. As a scholar aptly put it : 'Economics, not languages, is the key and poverty, not ethnic identity, is the issue and a classless society, and a socialist culture is the solution for the problem....of Manipur.'



Monpa carpet weavers - Arunachal Pradesh



Adi dance, Galo - Arunachal Pradesh



Yobin lisu girls at Vijoy Nagar in Changlang,
Arunachal Pradesh



Bodo dance
A colourful dance of the Bodos of the Assam



Ojhapali
Ancient traditional folk dance of Assam



Bihu dance of Assam



Lord krishna and Radhika

Rajshree Bhagyachandra created the 'Ras Lila' - the classical dance of Manipur in his enchanting dream by the grace of Lord Krishna – Manipur



“Sagol Kangjei” (Polo) originated in Manipur. The Manipuri Pony is a versatile, swift and agile polo pony. It is still a popular game where even players with international reputé take part.



The cemetery in honour of the soldiers who died in the
Second World War - Manipur



Wangala dance — Garo - Meghalaya



Shad suk Mynsiem festival - Meghalaya



Meghalaya dance

THE STORY OF MEGHALAYA

THE STORY OF Meghalaya has all the magic of the silent highlands, streams, isolated woodlands and quiet fields. When the State was carved out of the state of Assam on January 21, 1972 under the Northeastern Areas Reorganisation Act of 1971, with two hill districts, United Khasi & Jaintia District and Garo Hills District, it was given a poetic name — Meghalaya — the abode of clouds. Justifiably so as it was quite in tune with the natural ambience of the town, Shillong, which became the capital of the new State. It is essentially a hill State with an area of 22,489 Sq. Kms and a population of 23,06,069 according to the 2001 census figures. Tall pine trees abound the cloud kissed hills and the sylvan environs with fragrant air add to its beauty. Meghalaya and its gentle hills are home to some rare species of flora and fauna. About three hundred varieties of orchids are found. The rare species include Pitcher plant, Wild Citrus, Pygmy Lily and Lady's Slipper. The beauty of the butterflies in the forests and meadows is wonderful to the eyes.

It is a land of bountiful monsoon. The world's heaviest rainfall was recorded in Cherrapunjee. Now the highest precipitation area in the country has been shifted to Mawsynram, a short distance from Cherrapunjee, with over 11,000 mm of annual rainfall.

The two districts were further divided for the convenience of better administration and taking the welfare initiatives to the people at the grassroots. Firstly Jaintia Hills District was created and thereafter Khasi Hills District was divided into East and West Khasi Hills and Ri-Bhoi Districts and Garo Hills District into East South and West Garo Hills Districts.

The main tribes in these districts are Khasis, Pnars and Garos. All these tribal groups follow matrilineal descent systems. The Pnars or Jaintias are considered racial and linguistic kindred of the Khasis. The Garos, however, speak quite a different dialect and follow different social customs.

The Khasis present a paradoxical situation. By race they are Indo-Mongoloid, but they speak a language that belongs to the Mon-Khmer branch of the Austric family. According to their areas of habitation in the State the Khasis may be further divided into the following groups: Khynriams of the Khasi hills proper, the Pnars of Jaintia Hills, Wars in the south and Bhois in the north and the Lyngnams of the western border area.

Scholars hold different views on the subject. Some think that the Khasi-Jaintias are Austro-Asiatics, not merely linguistically but also racially. As Mr J.N. Chowdhury said : 'Probably the racial affinity or ethnological basis of any people is not reflected so clearly anywhere else than in his religion or his ideas of cosmogony; in other words in his weltan schauwng' or worldview. In this context, there is obviously a great deal of truth in Dalton's observations that the Austric speaking people who steadfastly adhered to their ancient faith also largely retained their original language.' Some are of the view that the Mongoloids were the third group to enter India. The Proto-Australoid were the second group, while the Negritos were the first group of migrants. The Mongoloids could be divided into two groups — the Palaeo-Mongoloids and the Tibeto-Mongoloids. Some scholars like Guha are of the opinion that the Khasis belong to the Palaeo-Mongoloid branch, which is supposed to be a mixture of Indo-Chinese and Austro-Asiatic population. The tribes of Northeast India are of Mongoloid origin. However as Das points out the Mongoloids who came after the Australoids might have absorbed in varying degrees the 'old Australoid strains.'

There is also a theory that the Khasi Pnars are the autochthons of the region-the aboriginal inhabitants of the Khasi Jaintia Hills. This is primarily based on folklore. As Mr. R.T. Rymbai said :

'The Khasi Pnars have a tradition told from one generation to another from time immemorial, that in the beginning God created sixteen families and made them stay with him in Heaven. They had the freedom to come and go between Heaven and Earth by means of a golden ladder which touched the top of a mountain peak named Sohpetbneng (the Navel of Heaven)... A time came when seven of these families expressed a desire to remain on earth. God granted them their wish and removed the ladder. Since then the seven families known as Ki Hynniew Trep (the seven huts) of whom we the Khasi Pnars are the descendants, remained on earth, and as they

increased and multiplied they spread from Sohpetbneng through the length and breadth of their fair land...'

The famous Khasi poet, U Soso Tham who is called Robert Burns of the Khasi highlands wrote in one of his compositions:

'The Khasis of old and the Pnars
Were a tribe of the far-sighted seers,
That hidden light which is to be treasured up
Still exists in native huts —
From which enlightenment can be gained
About the days of yore.'
(Ki Sngi barim U Hynniew Trep)

With all these views, the majority of scholars think that the Khasis belonging to the Mon-Khmer family migrated from their original home in Indo-China and during their westward movement through the Patkoi range settled in Assam valley and thereafter went further to the present day habitat in the Khasi Jaintia Hills.

The word 'Khasi' can be interpreted in two ways. In Khasi 'Kha' means 'born' and 'Si' means primeval mother. So a Khasi means 'born of the mother'. In another sense Khas means 'waste lands'. So Khasi may be interpreted as people, tribes inhabiting waste lands --- Khasi Hills. As already mentioned, the Khasi society is matrilineal and the entire family organisation revolves round the mother. An important feature of the society is respect for the ancient female progenitor. The mother is the custodian of the family property. The inheritance is passed on the female line. The youngest daughter is the custodian of the major share, while other daughters are entitled to a share each. As Dr. R.S. Lyngdoh said: 'According to the Khasi matrilineal system, the children belong to the mother and the mother belongs to her mother and this family, through mothers, to the common ancestress.'

As regards the customary law of inheritance, one has to differentiate ancestral property from acquired property. A man and his wife can bequeath the acquired property, distribute or dispose of this property, as they like. But the laws are clear about the ancestral property. Here the youngest daughter's prerogative has to be respected. She becomes the custodians of at least the larger share of the ancestral property. The reason is obvious. She has to bear the responsibilities and obligations of the family. R.S. Lyngdoh is of the

view that the matrilineal system of the Khasis is based on strong belief that seven families out of sixteen came down to earth to become the progenitors of the Khasi race. It is contrary to the Biblical belief that at the beginning there was only one man with his wife. 'That is the reason why in spite of the fact that more than half of the Khasis have become Christians, Christianity has got nothing to do with the matrilineal system of the race.'

Until the annexation by the British in 1833, the Khasi Hills was administered by an indigenous system of the institution of Syiemship. There were thirty Syiemships according to some records. However, on the eve of the British administration the number of Syiemships was sixteen. In addition to the Syiemships there were Sirdarships, Lyngdohships and Wahdadarships. The origin of the Syiemships may be traced back to respective female progenitors. To cite an example, the origin of the Hima Khyrim has been traced back to 'Ka Pah Syntiew'. According to local tradition and folklore 'Ka Pah Syntiew' was the niece of God Shillong. She dwelt in a cave at Marai, which is situated between Nongkrem and Pamlakrai. Once she was enticed by a man of the Myllemngap clan with a bunch of flowers. After twelve years of stay with the Myllemngap family she was married to a renowned warrior from Nongjri. In course of time she gave birth to two sons and one daughter. One day 'Ka Pah Syntiew' left her husband and children and went back to the cave at Marai. Despite all efforts she could not be located. Later when small states decided to form a common state, and the question to appoint a King came up, everybody in the Darbar spoke in favour of the eldest son of 'Ka Pah Syntiew' and he was accordingly made King of Hima Khyrim.

The advent of the British was a significant event for the Khasi Jaintia Hills. The Khasi King U Tirot Sing fought against the British. But he was defeated and captured and exiled to Dhaka, where he breathed his last. Bormanik II also fought against the British. He was defeated and he had to cede huge land to the south and west of the river Umiew to the British through an agreement. Later his successors handed over some areas in Shillong to the British. In fact, in real terms the British contact with the Khasi Jaintia Hills can be traced back to 1824 when the East India Company concluded a treaty of friendship with Ram Singh, the Raja of Jaintia on 10th March, 1824. The Treaty of Yandabo signed between the then

Burmese King and the East India Company on 24th February 1826 was a major landmark, which changed the course of the entire region. The King of Ava ceded Assam and its dependencies and the contiguous petty states of Cachar and Jyntea to the East India Company. Thereafter it was only a matter of time that the East India Company consolidated its hold over the area. The formation of the Khasi Hills Political Agency in 1835 saw the setting up of the official headquarters of the Agency at Cherra. By a Proclamation dated 6th February 1874 Assam and the hill areas were separated from the administration of the government of Bengal. On 12th September the same year Sylhet was incorporated into the jurisdiction of the newly formed Chief Commissionership. Lt. Col. R.H. Keatinge was appointed the first Chief Commissioner with Shillong as the capital of the new province.

The integration of the hill areas with the colonial administration of the British opened the window for change by exposing the traditional societies to modernising forces. The Serampore Baptist Mission, a branch of the London Baptist Society was the first Christian mission to arrive in Khasi Hills. Around 1813 Krishna Chandra Pal baptised seven Khasis at the immersion Baptist ceremony in the river Kushiara in the presence of a large crowd which include eight Khasi Syiems at Panduah on the outskirts of Bholaganj near the borders between Khasi Hills and Sylhet. Pal went back to Calcutta after working for eight months among the Khasis. The Serampore Baptist Mission, however, worked upto 1828 and translated the Bible in Khasi in Bengali script. The Khasi new Testament in Bengali script was printed in 1827. It was taught in the Baptist Mission school set up in Cherrapunjee up to 1838.

It was in 1841 that a new dawn was heralded in the Khasi Jaintia Hills when Khasi was reduced to the Roman script under the guidance of Rev. Thomas Jones of the Welsh Presbyterian Mission. He arrived at Cherrapunjee on 22nd June 1841 at a time when the new administration was gradually settling down after almost a decade old battle between the Khasi Chiefs and the East India Company during 1829-39. Rev. Jones set up three schools in Cherrapunjee and the new Roman alphabet was taught to the students. This helped not only the proselytization process but also revolutionary changes in social customs and structure.

The Khasi Hills was also exposed to other non-Christian influences. The 'Sadharan Brahmo Samaj' of Calcutta sent Nilmani Chakravorty as permanent representative in the Khasi Hills in 1870s. Chakravorty worked among the Khasis for about fifty years. The Adi Brahmo Samaj had another representative in Shillong—Prasanna Kumar Majumdar. These Brahmo Samaj representatives played an important role in the area of social reforms. But the movement did not last long enough to make any substantial impact. The Arya Samaj also made some feeble efforts. Another important mission, the Ramakrishna Mission did some commendable job. The Mission now runs a number of schools and dispensaries in the region. Its school in Cherrapunjee area is an important centre of learning. In retrospect these efforts could not have any lasting impact on the Khasi Jaintia society. It is primarily the Christianisation process--the impact of the missionary----which accounts for considerable social changes.

In spite of this, the most remarkable phenomenon in the Khasi society is the emergence of a strong movement for revival and renaissance. It emerged from a growing feeling among the elite of the society that the Christianisation process might endanger the indigenous socio-religious tradition. This awakening was given a shape through a literary movement, paradoxically by a person Babu Jeebon Roy who was the first Khasi to join the British Government service and retired as Senior Extra Assistant Commissioner.

Subsequently another socio-cultural organisation with more pronounced objectives called 'Seng Khasi' was set up on 23rd November 1899. It would be worthwhile to mention that Babu Jeebon Roy's son Babu Chandranath Roy was its founder-Secretary. The Seng Khasi had seven important objectives —

“To foster a sense of brotherhood among the Khasis who still retain their socio-cultural and religious heritage.

To create consciousness of God, the Sovereign Lord, the Almighty Creator, the Omnipotent, the Omniscient.

To earn righteousness through service and to respect one's own fellowmen with the sense of humanity and divinity.

To work for the mental and physical development for the fellow members and to regulate the way of living and moral and social conduct.

To work for the advancement of education.

To encourage national sports like archery, cultural dances and other social festivals and

To undertake welfare and development activities such as maintenance of cremation ground for those who dispose of their dead bodies according to tradition and religion.”

The Seng Khasi started its activities in right earnest and published many pamphlets and monographs on the Khasi customs and religious tenets-Niam and other related issues. It annually organises the Shad Suk Mynsiem or Thanks Giving Dance at the beginning of Spring. Several prominent Khasi personalities and intellectuals were associated with this new movement. They were successful in generating consciousness among the people about the rich treasures of the Khasi cultural heritage and the pressing need to protect the same from the elements that were creeping into the Khasi social milieu. The movement started as a reaction to the growing importance of and official patronage to Christianity. Seng Khasi is still going strong in preserving the Khasi culture. They still hold regular Sunday meetings of the Seng to propagate the indigenous faith of the Khasis besides imparting training in Khasi Dance forms. This glorification of the indigenous culture through a consistent movement is no doubt a significant phenomenon in contemporary Khasi society.

Khasi literature probably has the richest literary output among the tribal languages and also the Monkhmer Group of languages. It has grown in all branches. It is also the only tribal literature in India, which has been found suitable for teaching at the highest academic level of the University.

The University Grants Commission has accepted it for teaching up to M. Phil. and as a subject of study up to the Doctoral level under the North Eastern Hill University. The development of the Khasi language has reached a stage fulfilling the conditions laid down by the Sahitya Akademi.

The Khasi society still adheres to the traditional cultural heritage—the age-old customs and usages. The Matrilineal structure continues to be followed and accepted by society. There are, of course, some minor adjustments among the people in affluent classes and in

recent years, in the case of people going out of the State for academic and professional studies and work.

The people are now more conscious about their cultural identity. There is a strong move by the Steering Committee of the Federation of Khasi States (Hima Khasi) to get legal recognition for the Village Dorbars, Raid Dorbars (Communes) and Syiems Dorbars by the Centre. These Dorbars are traditional institutions still respected by the people and are quite different from the Panchayati Raj institutions. Decisions in the Dorbars are taken by consensus and not by the majority.

The Khasi Syiems or ruling Heads still maintain their democratic system of tradition. As Pandit Nehru, said “.... the Khasis are an extremely disciplined people, often more democratic than most of India. Without a Constitution they function democratically and carry out the decisions made by their elders and representatives without exception” The much talked about issue has been the District Council under the Sixth Schedule viz. the traditional administrative heads of the Khasi Hima (Khasi States). Sometimes voices are heard about the Khasi traditional Chiefs (Syiems) and some people ask for Constitutional protection for these Khasi traditional institutions.

The Garo tribal society presents an equally interesting picture. The hallmark of this group is matriliney. The descent is matrilineal. Inheritance is handed down to the females and the residence after marriage is uxorilocal. The clan affiliation among the Garos is determined through the mother and the father's side is practically ignored in the kinship system. A Garo family is composed of the parents, the unmarried children and sometimes one or even more than one married daughter and husband and their children. The parents select one of their daughters as inheritress and she is not necessarily the youngest daughter like the Khasis. This selected daughter is required to live permanently in the parental household. She alongwith her husband is to look after the parental property and the parents in their old age. The units of political action among the traditional Garos are lineages. Their structure is that of an acephalous kinship state.

There is no unanimity among scholars about the origin and the meaning of the word 'Garo'. However, the most satisfactory explanation could be that the word is of Boro origin. It has reasonably

been established that the Garos who belong to the Tibeto-Burman race first settled in the Brahmaputra valley before moving to the Garo hills. It is not unlikely that the Boros called them Garos, that is 'the ones who have left', 'the ones who have deserted them.' The Garos of the northern part of the Garo Hills and those of Assam call themselves 'Achik', while the Garos living in the southern and western parts of Garo Hills and Bangladesh call themselves 'Mande'. In Garo literature and among the educated classes the word 'Achik' is more commonly used.

The Garo traditional beliefs are numerous and the mythology voluminous. David Scott was the first to think of christianizing the Garos and he started corresponding with Serampore Baptist Mission for a missionary for the Garos. His efforts even to secure a missionary to work among the Garos were, however, of no avail. In 1822 Scott made a request to the Serampore Mission. Finding no response from there, he wrote to the East India Company's agents in London. These agents asked him to consult the Bishop in Calcutta. Scott decided to set up a school at Singimari. His proposal was duly recommended by the Calcutta Bishop. The Governor General accepted the suggestion of the Bishop and David Scott in 1826 and Mr. Valentine William Hurley was appointed School master at Singimari. Mr Hurley was subsequently found unfit to head the institution and he resigned. In his place no missionary was available and one junior teacher of English Mr. Fermie from Calcutta was appointed in July 1828. But unfortunately he died within four months of his joining the school in November the same year. The plan of running the school was abandoned. Thus the initial efforts of David Scott to Christianize the Garos suffered a setback.

The lull continued for about forty years till the American Baptist Mission started their work among the Garos. In between there were some feeble attempts but without any success. In 1847 a Government school was set up at Goalpara for Garo boys. Only ten Garo boys joined the school and only two out of them became Christians. These two boys, namely, Omed W. Momin and Ramke W. Momin were the first Garo converts to Christianity. Omed and Ramke were not only the first converts but also the first missionaries spreading the Gospel among the Garos. After consistent preaching despite initial reservation and protests from their fellow Garo villagers, they could convince a good number and in 1867 they invited Dr. Bronson,

a Baptist Missionary at Nowgong to baptise the first batch of 37 Garos. They were baptised and a church was founded at Rajasimla village. Later in 1870 it was decided that Tura be made a mission station. In November 1878 the mission started functioning from Tura and since then there is no looking back and the expansion of the Church in the Garo hills went on apace.

Besides the Baptists, the Roman Catholic Church Mission started work in the Garo Hills in 1932 and their first Church was set up in 1933. The Seventh Day Adventist and the Church of North India are also in the field, though with not much of following.

With the Christianization process, the first major concern was the evolution of a script for the Garo language. The story was similar to that of the Khasi language. The Bengali script had been in use for more than three decades. The translation of the gospel by St. Matthew published in 1875 and the other four Gospels published in 1876 were all written in the Bengali script. The new Testament and the Old Testament were also rendered in Garo in the Bengali character. Towards the last decade of the nineteenth century, the American Baptist Mission decided to switch over to the Roman script. In addition to the use of the Roman characters for new books, the Romanization of the existing translation works also started on a large scale. Mr. E.G. Phillips, who took over the work from Mr. T.J. Keith made a significant contribution to the development and use of the Roman script for the Garo language. His early publications in the Roman alphabet included 'Anchihgrikam' in 1902. The Romanization of the New Testament 'Niam Kitab' was a landmark in the process of transliteration.

Christianity thus started taking roots gradually and by the thirties of the twentieth century became a powerful influence. The traditional Garo society and its various institutions faced serious threat and their decline was concomitant with the spread of the new religion. But there were other significant factors for this phenomenon of transition, namely, development of formal education, spread of plough cultivation and the Constitutional protection under the Sixth Schedule for the tribal culture, customs, laws and the way of life and the autonomous development by the tribal people.

Many institutions like the Nokpante — the bachelors' dormitory, the practice of 'Chaparikgipa' — the people working in a household

for a certain period in lieu of food and lodging, the Garo code of law, the old system of village administration came under what may be called a process of transformation. The Garos converted to Christianity began giving up everything, which smack of traditional culture even though some of them did not clash with the tenets of Christianity or Christian values. Even things like traditional dress and ornaments, musical instruments, pattern of house and even personal names were given up by the neo-converts. Like many other areas in the northeast, Christianity was propagated through primary education. So Christianity and education have been equated in the popular perception among the Garos. Formal education and Christianity acted upon Garo culture jointly and simultaneously.

The structure of the Garo society underwent change with gradual introduction of permanent plough cultivation. The shifting cultivation still continues and during its heyday, the Garo village had to have large settlements and in that case institutions like bachelors' dormitories could thrive. With lesser yield from shifting cultivation, the household were scattered and construction of grand bachelors' dormitories became redundant and impracticable. Moreover, permanent cultivation required less of community activities and in fact, each household became the work unit in the household land. This caused change in the work schedule of the household. The institution of 'Nokpante' became a decaying institution.

Before the contact with the British, the Garo settlements were divided into various 'Akhings', clan owned areas. They had no organised form of government of their own. The Chief of each clan was called 'Nokma', who held the area as a custodian and supervised the Akhing property and settled disputes in his area of jurisdiction. The British set up a unified administration and brought all the Garo groups together under it and also gave a tax collection structure and some sort of police, revenue and judicial administration. Loyal and prominent Garos were appointed Laskars for revenue collection and adjudication of local disputes within their respective jurisdiction, into which several Nokma Akhings have been grouped. Several Garo people with leadership qualities were appointed Sardars as some sort of rural police to help the Laskars maintain peace in the respective areas. This development brought into the Garo social structure an element of diarchy. The Nokmas as the repository of traditional authority had to give up their pre-eminent position to the

new emerging power structure with the Laskars and Sardars. In the new set up, the Laskars' appeal lies with the Deputy Commissioners who as representatives of the British authority had to ratify the selection of Nokmas by the clan members. The traditional institutions remained but with reduced powers. The missions became another source of influence to the Garo society. The consequence of all these new factors is the shift of power from the kinship groups to Laskars and the Mission societies. The village school cum church complex became the new centre of the village structure where the pastors and the primary teachers used to wield powerful influence on the villagers within their areas. In 1935, the Garo Hills district was declared partially excluded area. Two representatives from the district were allowed to join the Provincial Assembly. This paved the way for the Garos to take part in the modern political institutions.

During the thirties and forties of the twentieth century, various movements for what could be described as renaissance and reformation of the society began under the guidance of the emerging literate class among the Garos. Demands were raised for setting up a High School and recognition of Garo in the University examination. Mr. Kosan G. Momin, a Garo literary writer started the first organization for the welfare and unity of the Garos. The Garo collegians of Guwahati founded as Association of Garo students and a literary journal, *Achik Kurang* (Voice of the Garos). All this created a new awareness among the Garos and left its impact on their minds. Apart from literacy and extensive trade and commerce with the neighbouring areas, another new factor added to this awareness. That was the return of the Garo exservicemen to their society with a new worldview. This created what is described as awareness of collective self-identity. These factors led to the setting up of a new political party — the Garo National Council in 1946 'to promote, protect and preserve the interest of the Garos in the background of the country's Independence and the consequent administrative and the Constitutional changes.'

As mentioned earlier, the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution provided for formation of Autonomous District Councils for all the hill districts of Assam and other tribal areas in the northeast region. These areas were to be kept under the control of the Governor to ensure special protection to these areas and the people thereof. As Pandit Nehru said, through this Constitutional provision and the

mechanism of Autonomous District Councils the hill people would be able not only to safeguard their culture, traditions and practices and customs, but also to gather experience in administration and self-rule. Meanwhile, the political organizations of the hill people like Garo National Council, Eastern India Tribal Union mooted the idea of an Eastern Hill State. The Eastern India Tribal Union spearheading the demand for a hill state swept the polls in the second General Elections in most of the hill districts. In the wake of the Assam Official Language Bill, most of the ministers from the hills resigned from the Assam Ministry and under the auspices of the Eastern India Tribal Union met in Shillong and founded the All Party Hill Leaders Conference (APHLC) on July 6-7, 1960. This was further accentuated by the move of the government of Assam to declare Assamese 'as a language for all or any of the official purposes in the State of Assam'. The APHLC became the principal political organ of the hill people in the region. The second conference of the APHLC held in Shillong on 22-23 August 1960 authorised its Council of Action 'to prepare a plan or pattern of separation'. The third conference on November 16-18, 1960 articulated the aspirations very clearly. It said that the creation of a separate State was the real issue and fulfillment of that goal was the only solution that can safeguard the interests and satisfy the legitimate aspirations of the hill people.

From a number of parleys held between November 1960 and the General Elections of 1962 among the APHLC delegations and the then Prime Minister and Home Ministers, several proposals emerged. Firstly the 'Scottish Pattern' proposal was mooted. But the APHLC leaders rejected it. On June 10, 1963 Pandit Nehru broached the proposal of 'full autonomy' in stead of the 'Scottish Proposal.' This was branded as 'Nehru Plan' and the APHLC leaders decided to give the Nehru Plan a fair trial. The Pataskar Commission was set up to work out the details of the Nehru Plan. The Pataskar Commission's recommendations, however, did not satisfy the APHLC leaders. Meanwhile, Pandit Nehru passed away and with him the Nehru Plan was also given a go-by. Later a proposal for an integrated set up with regional autonomy was mooted by a Cabinet Sub-committee headed by the then Home Minister of India. Another proposal of a 'Hill Sub-State' within Assam was also suggested. The response of the APHLC was articulated by Capt. Sangma:

'We will not budge from our demand: but again we can not live alone'. An integrated Zonal set-up comprising the Hill State was thought of for the sake of development works of inter-State nature, better communication and harnessing of natural resources. Subsequently another proposal-the Federal Plan', which speaks of a federal structure of administration in Assam with federating units having equal status came up after intense discussions between the Govt. of India and the leaders of the APHLC. This Plan envisaged a limited number of essential subjects of common interest to be assigned to a regional federation and the rest of the State functions to the federating units, which will have their own legislature and Council of Ministers. The Asoka Mehta Committee was set up in July 1967 to work out an agreed formula to settle the reorganization issue. The Mehta Committee in its recommendations rejected the federal structure plan and opposed the bundling up of all the hill districts. The APHLC had earlier boycotted the Committee and hence it was practically rendered ineffective. The Central Govt. decided to refer the reorganisation issue to the national leaders of all the political parties. After long and protracted deliberations emerged a Plan on 11th September 1968, which stipulated the creation of an autonomous State within Assam and setting up of the North Eastern Council 'with a view to encouraging an integrated approach to the security and development of the region.' The Prime Minister of India inaugurated the Autonomous State of Meghalaya in Shillong on April 2, 1970 following the passing of the Assam Reorganisation (Meghalaya) Act. The full-fledged State of Meghalaya saw the light of the day on January 21, 1972.

The land tenure system in Meghalaya presents an interesting picture of the social structure and its impact on society. Though the tribal societies have a relatively egalitarian character, it does not mean that such societies are free from any symptoms of social stratification and unequal economic opportunities. For example, the Khasi land tenure system has two broad categories — Ri Riad, community land and Ri Kynti, private land. The public land is divided into Crown land, meant for the rulers, Lyngdoh land, land for the priests, the village land, the land for the village community, and the sacred groves, the habitat of gods and deities. The ownership of land in this category is vested in the community, that is, village, Riad or State. This category of land may also include forestland, boundary land won by war and land of extinct families.

Private land on the other hand, is the land owned by particular clans and also the land personally acquired by an individual. The latter type of land becomes ancestral land in course of time. Clan land is the undivided property of the concerned clan with the right of inheritance vested in the youngest daughter (Ka Khadduh) under the protection of the mother's brother or maternal uncles.

The pattern of ownership, control and occupancy rights generate inequality in the distribution of land over a period of time. This has resulted in alienation from land and emergence of a large number of landless people. This is also primarily responsible for the emergence of a stratified society. As a social scientist pointed out: 'though the society is by tradition a casteless and classless society, the traditional pattern of authority leadership structure and administration was almost the same ascriptive one as found elsewhere in India.' A glimpse into the socio-political structure of the Khasi states and Jaintia kingdom shows the presence of a few clans forming the ruling oligarchy. Here the Riads are found to have taken the form of small oligarchies, which federated to emerge as states with the clans of the Lyngdohs, Basans or Bakhraws, as the founding members, sitting at the helm of affairs through their respective clan representatives. It was a common situation that the landed aristocracy had control over both the political power and social behaviour.

The land among the Garos has two broad classifications — Khas land and Akhing land. The traditional concept is that a given Akhing is the property of a particular clan and the Akhing Nokma is the custodian of the land. So the land suitable for cultivation is the possession of a lineage. The right to utilize it is enjoyed by all the villagers in common, and some of them might be members of lineages different from the land owning lineage. The power of transfer of land through sale rests with the owner-lineage. An individual or a family under no circumstances can dispose of land to either an individual or a family. This pattern of land ownership has been undergoing changes over the years. The role of the Garo Hills District Council and the extension of the provisions of Assam Land and Revenue Regulations is quite significant.

The emergence of Shillong as the capital forms part of the growth of the State.

The British Government initiated a move to shift the headquarters from Cherra to Shillong in 1863. U Jeeban Roy wrote :

‘After the Jaintia rebellion, the English Government came to a decision to shift the headquarters to a place more centrally situated, equidistant from left, right, east and west and also because the rainfall in Sohra was too heavy. I remember this was Col. Bivar’s (then Deputy Commissioner) who spread out the map of Ri Khasi and sent also for me to help him choose the site; thus this site was chosen with a plan to station the European Regiment in Upper Shillong.’

The Capital was shifted on March 20, 1874. But not to Shillong, but to the valley of Iewduh, below Shillong. The name was subsequently changed to Shillong, which is associated with a local myth and the highest hill feature. Shillong remained the capital of Assam till the creation of the full State of Meghalaya except for a brief period during the interregnum of Eastern Bengal and Assam (1905-12). According to one Khasi myth Ka Pah Syntiew, the first queen is the daughter of Shillong God who is worshipped with the supreme God. Shillong peak is considered his abode.

There is another myth associated with Shillong. Once upon a time there lived a woman called Lir at Bisi, a village near Myllem. The villagers named her Crazy Lir, as her behaviour was somewhat peculiar. Once she became pregnant and the people in the village, particularly her relatives started taunting her about the fatherhood. She then ran away from home to a place called Rynngngi Shyllong where she gave birth to a still-born boy. He was buried in her garden. Many years had passed since and the incident had also been forgotten. One night Lir was suddenly awakened from sleep by the sound of a large number of people gathered near her hut. She jumped out of her bed and rushed to the spot to find out what happened. To her surprise she saw a large number of men digging up her field and a handsome young man was supervising the work. Lir went to him straight and asked him why they were digging up her land and thus snatching away her source of living. The youth replied: ‘Oh mother, don’t you recognise me? I am the same boy whom you had buried in this garden and on my orders these men are digging up the land, so that you don’t have to work hard and you may relax. Now go and call at the uncles and elder male relatives.

I will tell them about the rites and ceremonies they have to perform to call me for help in time of need.'

The name of that youth is U Shyllong (Shu-long), which means 'one who grows naturally' or 'one who comes in existence by himself.' Ever since Shyllong or Shillong is an awe-inspiring god. It is said that when the people of Myllem went to meet U Shillong after performing due ceremonies, they never dared to turn their backs on the peak on their return journey. They moved slowly and reverently backwards step by step till it disappeared from view. A phrase 'Khot Shyllong' is still current among the people of Shella and adjoining areas. It means 'call U shyllong in time of need for help and succour.'

Thus grew the 'Scotland of the East' as the administrative centre but with little industrial and commercial establishments.

THE MIZO RIDDLE

IT IS A paradox—the proverbial Mizo riddle. Like Chhurbura, endearingly called Chhura who was the most foolish and at times the most intelligent of the Homo sapiens. Chhura's activities and behaviour were really strange. Once Chhura saw Chengkek tree with beautiful red fruits. He could have easily plucked the fruits from the branches. But how can he pluck the fruits? The fruits can be plucked after climbing the tree. The trunk is too slender. Chhura also started fearing spotted colours, as his wife once told him that he should either avoid or try to protect himself from all things and animals who have such colour spots like the tiger. The wife's apron which was spotted was being dried in open air. When the wife came back home after day's work, she saw her apron torn to pieces. Chhura confessed that he had done it with a spear, as all spotted colours were considered dangerous.

The same Chhura was once caught by his enemies in his jhum field. The captors then led him to their village, which was quite far away. Chhura was devising plans to get rid of them. He complained of pain in his foot and said that a thorn had pierced his foot and he would not be able to move further till the thorn was removed. He innocently told the captors, 'Let us sit down in a row and then remove the thorn'. The captors followed his suggestion and sat down in a row on a rock. Chhura sat down on a little elevated place. When one man tried to take out the thorn, Chhura threw out his leg with such force that all the people in the row rolled on one another down the hill. Chhura escaped just by his wits. That was the strange phenomenon associated with figures like Chhura. No less paradoxical was the behaviour of folk figures like Lalruanga and Liandova.

Even the terrain is tranquil and at the same time exuberant. Steep and rugged hills lacerated by whimsical rivers. It is a land of spirit and materialism, hopes and disenchantment, rising aspirations and innate vitality. The five major uneven mountain ranges gradually descending from the south to the north depict the rugged grandeur

of the topography of the enchanting land. The highest hill, Phawngpui, popularly known as the Blue mountain rise to about 2,065 metres and the other lower peaks—Lengteng, Chalfilh, Tan, Lurh and Hmuifang associated with many legends add to the mystic beauty. The swift rivers with rapids and sheer drops--Tlawng, Chhimtuipui, Khawthlangtuipui, Vanva, Tuirial, Tuivawl and Tut criss-cross the land. Some of them mingle into the Barak in Assam and some even flow into neighbouring Bangladesh and Myanmar.

The young state of the Indian Union which covers an area of 21,087 Sq. Kms is flanked by Tripura and Bangladesh in the west, Myanmar in the east and south and Manipur and Assam in the north. The story of the people, who live as a close-knit society, is no less absorbing. There are several tribes and sub-tribes within the generic Mizo identity. The major tribes are Lusei, Ralte, Hmar, Paite and Pawi, while the eleven sub-tribes—Chawngthu, Chawhte, Ngente, Khawlhring, Khiangte, Pautu, Rawite, Renthlei, Tlau, Vangchhia and Zawngte are commonly known as Awzia and have merged themselves within the Mizo identity. The development of this new identity is no freak incident. It signifies a new sense of solidarity and consciousness of nationalistic feeling and articulation of the aspirations of the people.

The erstwhile Lushai Hill District in the state of Assam was changed to Mizo District by an Act of Parliament called 'The Lushai Hill District (Change of Name) Act, 1954'. Under the provisions of the Act, the change of the name was effected with effect from 29th April 1954. Major McCall who was in charge of the Lushai Hills for several years has recorded the gradual transformation of the Lushai under two powerful contacts at work. One was the new form of government in the institution of the Political Officer, later the Superintendent, Lushai Hills and the other was the missionaries. The Lushai passed through the chrysalis stage paving the way to a new ethnic consciousness. That made it possible to transcend the narrow confines of smaller tribes and sub-tribes.

The reason for this transformation is not far to seek. Almost all the chieftains of the people inhabiting the former Lushai Hills District belonged to the Lusei sub-tribe, and when these people first came into contact with the people of the plains of Cachar and Sylhet districts of Assam and the Chittagong Hills Tract now in Bangladesh, it was not unusual to call the people after the Chieftains' identity.

Even the origin of the word Lushai is shrouded in mystery. The word 'Lu' means head, but the affix 'shai' is difficult to explain. According to one interpretation, 'shai' means 'to shoot' or 'hunt'. Another meaning of 'sei' (shai) is long. Major McMcCall says that the Hualngos in the Chin Hills of Myanmar are primarily Lusheis who did not migrate from Falam country to Lushai Land when the Chins drove out the Lushei clans from there. The Hulangos trace their origin to the rocks at Seipui and subsequently they came to be known as sons of Sei. This led to the name Lushei, later modified to Lushai.

It is therefore in the fitness of things that after Independence the people decided to give up the old name in favour of the generic and composite identity with a wider connotation. The term Mizo has been derived from two words, namely, Mi and Zo. Mi means man and there is no debate on that. But the word Zo has different meanings. According to one view it means highland. It may also mean cold region. Another interpretation says that the word can be traced to the name of the area Zopui which had been built around 1765 about thirty-three kilometers to the west of Tiau river. Many folk ballads contain references to the people of the area Zopui engaged in heroic exploits and they were proud to refer to them as people of Zopui (Mi of Zopui).

The word Zo can also be linked to the Burmese word 'Yaukkya' (Yauchhia) which means man. This Burmese word can further be traced back to the Chinese word 'Yoe', pronounced as Zo or Dzo. Lt. Col. Tom Lewin and B.S. Carey in their accounts have confirmed the use of the word Dzo, Zo, or Yo to refer to the men in the hills. Further 'Kkya' (Chhia) of Yaukkya (Yauchhia) also means man, as indicated in the word 'Hmeichhia', where 'Hmei' means female or wife and 'Chhia' means man. From all these linguistic evidence, it may be concluded that the word Mizo being composed of two parts means man, nay a strong and powerful man. It is a case of pleonastic and emphatic word-formation:

There is a dearth of unimpeachable evidence about the time of the continuous settlement of the Mizo people in the present land. Some scholars are however of the view that the Mizo settlement is for a period between three hundred and four hundred years. It appears that they belonging to the Tibeto-Burman sub-group moved through Hukawng valley to the Chindwin belt where they settled in Kebaw valley around Khampat. From there they came to the Chin

Hills because of Shan pressure and settled on the Than range and from there to the Len range near Tiau river. Later they crossed the Tiau river and moved further to the present land. They are credited to have built up a village called Selsih, which disintegrated and they moved further to the west. Towards the end of the nineteenth century in 1898, they were brought under the British administration. The southern and the northern parts were amalgamated into one district called Lushai Hills District and put under the charge of the government of Assam with Aizawl as the district headquarters. Following the enactment of the Government of India Act of 1935, the Lushai Hills District along with a few other areas was kept within the 'Excluded Areas'. These areas were made the exclusive preserve of the Governors who were entrusted with the special responsibility to administer the areas. After Independence the provisions of the sixth schedule were extended to these areas and the Lushai Hills District was given the status of Autonomous District. In 1954 epoch making legislation was passed. The Assam Lushai Hills District (Acquisition of Chiefs Rights Act) abolished the institution of the Chiefs and the rights and interests of 259 Lushai Chiefs and 50 Pawi-Lakher Chiefs were vested in the government. The Mizo district was upgraded into a Union Territory in 1972 with the implementation of the North Eastern Reorganization Act, 1971. Three autonomous Districts, namely Chakma, Lakher and Pawi were also created. Earlier from the early part of 1966 the district faced serious internal disturbances. The Mizo National Front under the leadership of Laldenga gave a call for independence for the Mizo Hills. The two-decade-old disturbance came to an end on June 30, 1986 with the signing of a Memorandum of Settlement by the government of India and the Mizo National Front. The provisions of the agreement included upgradation of the Union Territory to the status of a State. Mizoram became a State of the Indian Union in February 1987. Thus within a span of less than a century between 1898 and 1987 the Lushai Land, the Lushai Hills District, to be precise, underwent several political and administrative changes and re-organization of the areas to ensure greater measure of local control. The State is now divided into eight districts--namely, Aizawl, Lunglei, Saiha, Lawngtlai, Champhai, Kolasib, Mamit and Serchhip.

As already mentioned, the missionary enterprise left a lasting influence on the Mizos. The arrival of Savidge and Lorrain, the pioneering missionaries of the London Arthington Baptist Mission in

Aizawl on 11th January 1894 is significant as it had a very powerful impact on the social cultural and political life of the Mizos in the years to come. Rev. D.E.Jones of the Welsh Presbyterian Mission came three years later in August 1897. Savidge and Lorrain moved to the south at Serkawn near Lunglei, while the Welsh Presbyterian Mission continued their work in the north. Within a year of their arrival Savidge and Lorrain gave Roman alphabets to the Lusei dialect. This had a great advantage to spread not merely the gospel but also education. Under the guidance of J. Shakespear who functioned, as Superintendent of the district for seven years, there was a tremendous push to the dissemination of education to the grassroots through a common language. Another important element in the whole process is delegation of education to the missions. In addition to spreading the Holy Gospel, the missions became practically the official educationists and gradually the most important employers as well. Government officials change on transfer, while the missionaries remained for years at their posts. They spread their network through Lushai employees at work. This helped better personal contacts with the people in the remote areas. As McCall said, initially the Welsh Mission employed about eight or nine missionaries, including two hospital sisters, while the London Baptist Mission about eight missionaries including two hospital sisters. So the Missions had to depend on the Lushai employees to carry out the tasks. A close association was established between education, salaried jobs and Christianity, leading to the emergence of a new privileged class, 'an unindigenous oligarchy', and the 'articulate Lushai'.

The changes in society were spectacular involving 'attack after attack on tradition'. The codes and dictates of the Churches sometimes came in conflict with the traditional and pre-Christian practices and beliefs and institutions. The main impact of this obviously fell on the ordinary people. Even the Zawlbuk system came under severe strain. The Zawlbuk is in short the bachelors barrack where the young boys used to learn all the disciplines of the Lushai social life. This special house was built and maintained by communal efforts. The spread of Christianity atrophied this institution as part of the tendency to destroy everything associated with the practices prior to the Christian era. A new institution Young Mizo Association (YMA) was initiated in its place.

Even the institution of Chieftains was affected. With the growth

of influence of the pastors and the teachers, and individualism in approaches to life, the 'thrill of seeking independence' from the Chiefs and customary community disciplines, a new leadership started emerging from the articulate Lushai. This new leadership formalised later through the formation of the first political party on 9th April, 1946---the Mizo Union---found that the struggle against the traditional hereditary Chieftains was essential. The Christianisation, thus led to the churning of the social classes, practices and the institutions. No wonder the Lushai society came up in a new form through this process of social engineering after its chrysalis stage.

Closely linked to the process of Christianisation and modernization is the expansion of education and harnessing of human resources. In fact, spreading of the Gospel and education went hand in hand. Over eighty eight per cent of the total population of 8,91,058 is literate. The male and female population figures are 4,59,783 and 4,31,275 respectively. The first formal school opened in Aizawl in November 1893. Subsequently Schools were also started in Lunglei and Demagiri in 1894. But these were not available to the Lushai boys. Savidge and Lorrain set up a primary school for the Lushai boys on April 2, 1894. On 21st August 1897, a government school was established for the Lushai boys. Later Rev. D.E. Jones started another school on 15th February 1898. These were all sporadic efforts during the initial contact with the British. From the 1900s it was decided to entrust the educational activities to the missionaries. The first lower Primary Examination was conducted in 1903 covering the whole district. Since then the Lower Primary and Middle School Leaving Examinations were conducted by the Missions at Aizawl and Serkawn till 1947. The Church in those days confined their education programmes through primary, middle and some high schools. So the emphasis was more on the elementary levels. Even then the alchemy of education transformed the social structure and values to a substantial extent. With the close connection between education, Christianity and salaried jobs, the Lushais could gain a status of 'material and cultural advantage', which was not conceivable within the indigenous social framework. At present there are 821 Primary Schools, 64 Middle English Schools, 532 Middle Schools, 208 High Schools and 34 Higher Secondary Schools operating in the State.

Though belated, the efforts for higher education also started bearing fruits. The first Matriculate was produced in 1910, while the

first graduate received his degree in 1924. For post graduation degree there was a long wait till 1945 when Mr. L.B. Thanga obtained the Master's Degree in Economics from the University of Calcutta. Today the higher education is spreading steadily among the Mizos. There are twenty-eight degree colleges throughout the State in addition to a couple of Training colleges and Polytechnics. For higher studies in the fields of Engineering and Medicine there is a provision of seat allotment for the students of the State under Central Pool and North Eastern Council Quota in the institutions outside the State.

The first University, Mizoram University came into being on 2nd July 2001 in Aizawl. Prior to this, Mizoram Campus of the Northeastern Hill University had been functioning in Mizoram since 1979. The Mizoram Accord of 30th June 1986 stated inter alia: 'It is open to the State to move for the establishment of a separate University in the state in accordance with the prescribed procedure'. Sanctioned under ninth and tenth Plan allocation the faculties are being set up in a phased manner. The emphasis is on areas of studies, which would be relevant, need-oriented and area specific. The aim is to make the University truly representative of the identity and the circumstances of the people, their own window on the world and a major catalyst for their development.

Though there is no necessary relationship between urbanization and modernization, the process of urbanisation brings about changes in social and political institutions and the occupational pattern. In Mizoram, Christianity has been a modernising force with the introduction of formal education, modern methods of medicine and abolition of various archaic practices. The process of urbanization has further accelerated the transformation of the primordial society. The creation of townships in Mizoram can be traced back to the need of the British expeditionary forces to have suitable permanent posts. The column under Col. Skinner which proceeded to the hills along the course of the Dhaleswari river to punish the Lushai Chiefs selected a site, which was later christened 'Aijal'. That was March 1890 and the foundation of the future township and the district headquarters was laid on the recommendation of Mr. Daly of the Assam Police.

Aizawl, the capital city of today belonged to the Chieftdom of

Khalkom, the eldest son of Sukpilal, the North Lushai Chief. Subsequently Captain Browne and Lieutenant HWG Cole of the 2nd Gorkhas made it a strong military post. Started as a strategic settlement with two stockades and a few buildings, the place has become the largest urban centre in the State over a period of time with a population of 3,39,812 according to the census of 2001 followed by Lunglei, the other important town with a population of 1,37,155. In fact, after peace was restored in the North Lushai Hills in 1891, the expansion work of Aizawl was carried out under the leadership of the then Political Officer, Mr. Davies and Capt. Loch. The work continued during the tenure of Lt. Co. J. Shakespeare and Mr. A.J. McCall.

Almost in a similar fashion of Mr. Daly, one reconnaissance party of Gen. Tregear's Expedition had set up a stockade in March 1889 at Lunglei (Lung means stone and Lei means bridge). Thus came up another post, which slowly became the nucleus of a township.

Form these fledgling efforts the process of urbanization in Mizoram took giant leaps and today it is the most urbanised State in India with 46.29 per cent of its total population living in urban areas, followed by Goa with 41.03 percent and Maharashtra with 38.73 per cent. The process of urbanisation in Mizoram has, however, been triggered not so much as a follow up of either industrialization or the level of economic development. It may be attributed mostly to various socio-political changes. The towns there have grown as service centres and with importance as centres of administration. Migration to the urban centres is not so much due to expansion of basic activities but people's aspirations to be nearer the seat of power with the aim of taking benefits of State, district and sub-divisional levels of administration. So the urbanisation has not necessarily resulted in the growth of urban economy as such.

So the 22 townships throughout the State have grown mostly with the gradual political and administrative transformation of the area. Upgradation of the Lushai Hills District (later converted to Mizo Hills District) into a Union Territory in 1972 and a full-fledged State in 1987, setting up of various offices and service centres and concentration of various amenities and facilities under a number of Plan schemes and programmes for specific target groups helped in rapid urbanisation.

The insurgency in the sixties and the intervention of the security forces led to the declaration of the district as 'a disturbed area'. A new policy of regrouping of villages by which over eighty per cent of the people were relocated in 'group centres' near the roads was adopted. This was done as a counter-insurgency measure. In the first phase, the villages on the Silchar—Aizawl—Lunglei road were grouped into various centres and these were called Protected and Progressive villages. In the second phase, the grouping was taken up in the rest of the northern part of Mizo Hills. The grouping of the villages in the central and southwestern parts of the district could not be carried out following stay order of the Guwahati High Court in 1968.

Under the scheme of grouping, villages, mostly small, far-flung and isolated ones, within a radius of fifty kilometers or so were shifted to a selected village, which became the grouping centre.

Granting of the Union Territory status in January 1972 brought about devolution of political authority and socio-economic development was given further boost. From the Fifth Five-year Plan (1974-79) onwards, Mizoram along with Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh became the recipient of highest per capita public expenditure on development in the country. The Sixth Plan outlay for Mizoram was 1300 million rupees, while the Seventh Plan was 2600 million rupees. This bonanza created conditions for peace. But the high concentration of commercial linkages, health services and employment opportunities and other infra-structural amenities led to urban extension.

The signing of the Memorandum of Settlement on June 30 in 1986 is an epoch making event as it marked an end to the two-decade-old disturbance and paved the way for uninterrupted atmosphere of peace for development. It was decided to confer Statehood on the Union Territory and also protect the practices and customary laws, related positions regarding ownership and transfer of land. This led to numerous initiatives in the field of development. The passage of 53rd Constitution Amendment Bill and the State of Mizoram Bill by Parliament providing for a forty member legislative Assembly are landmarks in the history of Mizoram. It had to economic development and preservation of the rights and privileges and social and cultural heritage of the people of the State. The post independent

era can thus be broadly divided into three segments—the initial twenty-five year period between 1947 and 1972, the period between 1972 and 1987 and the statehood from 1987 to the present day. There has been phenomenal increase in the number of urban centres over the years. The urbanisation and development process has been spread over the two major geographical divisions of the State—the mountainous terrain in the east and the ridge and valley region in the west. There are thirteen urban centres, the major centres being the capital town of Aizawl and Lunglei in the ridge and valley region, while there are nine in the mountainous terrain in the east, the major centres being Champhai and Saiha.

These are major developments, no doubt and the urban growth has opened up new vistas of opportunity. But one can easily discern an obvious failing in the process. The two major factors pointed out by economists and sociologists—urban base ratio and social mobility, agglomeration economies and urban multipliers, which lead to the expansion and diversification of non-agricultural occupations have at best a marginal role. The process has not been accompanied by transformation of the values of society either. There has not been much growth and expansion of urban economy even in places like Champhai and Vairengte as viable commercial centres with respective hinterlands. Sometimes doubts are, therefore, raised about the viability of the urban centres with the risk of losing their status in the event of diminution of their administrative importance. However, with the gradual expansion of scientific and rational outlook and ability of the people to adjust to the changing structural and behavioral needs the urbanization in the State, one may a guess, has come to stay.

The advent of Christianity has transformed the Mizo society significantly. Still one cannot avoid occasional conflict between the dictates of the Church and the educational missions on one hand and the age-old and traditional practices on the other. This is evident in the case of festivals and the accompanying dances. Mizo society still functions through basic customary laws and ceremonies. The festivals and other facets ultimately are useful in assertion of the identity of the Mizos. The elements, which go against the Christian tenets have been discarded and the festivals are observed with the traditional dances. The Mizos have three main festivals—Mim Kut, Pawl Kut and Chapchar Kut. These festivals are generally associated with the

agricultural activities. Mim Kut is celebrated in August-September after the harvesting is over. It is primarily a thanks-giving ceremony, dedicated to the memory of the dear and departed ones. A portion of the year's first harvest is offered at the platform, called 'Lungdawh' in memory of the dead.

Pawl Kut is held in December-January after the harvest and singing, dancing and community feasting are part and parcel of this festival. The villagers celebrate the festival in a mood of happiness and with enthusiasm.

Chapchar Kut is the most important traditional festival, held sometimes in March or at the beginning of the Spring. The time between the jungle clearing operation and the burning of jhum is considered suitable with the splash of colour of the springtime. The evolution of the festival shows how the Mizos have gradually given up the animistic elements and retained those, which do not clash with the Christian tenets and effected a fine resolution in search and retention of their essential identity and culture. A study of this process provides an inkling of how the creative Mizo mind has evolved with time.

Chapchar Kut celebrated in all Mizo villages became part of the tradition. In the old days, the festival generally continued for five to six days. The first two days were devoted to pig killing for feast and drinking Zu, the country beer and making preparations for dancing and singing. The third day termed Chai Ni is the dancing day when the young men and women attired in best dresses and ornaments dance and sing all through the night in the compound of the Chief's house. The fourth day is called Zupui Ni. Zupui is beer brewed with husks specially prepared for festive days. Zupui is consumed the whole day and in the evening songs and dances are organised, which continue throughout the night. The fifth day is solemnized as Zu Thing Chaw Ni. On this day the entire Zu is consumed. The sixth day is the rest day, the day of siesta. No activity, hunting or going out of the village is undertaken on that day. The legend says once in Chawngtui village, the longest ever Chapchar Kut was held and the villagers were so much engrossed in festivities that they forgot jhumming work. It led to famine and the villagers had to migrate to neighboring villages.

As is evident, the festival has animistic roots. So with the passage

of time it had to undergo changes. The practice of mass feeding and drinking of locally made beer and dancing throughout the night had to be discarded. Instead presentation of traditional dances has taken precedence. Colourful parading of different clans with their traditional proceedings has also become part and parcel of the festival now. This modified version of Chapchar Kut has got the widest patronage from individuals, organisations and the government. It has emerged as the most popular and colourful festival of Mizoram.

Various dances of the Mizos are the expressions of their happy and carefree life patterns. There are a number of folk and community dances, which are passed on from generations to generations. Like the festivals these dance forms are also rooted in their pagan past. But they have been revived and retained in modified versions as part of their identity assertion. Cheraw, the famous bamboo dance is the most colourful of the Mizo dances. In the olden days it used to be performed to ensure safe passage to Paradise for a dead child. So it was performed with great care, precision, elegance and also humility. It was associated with sanctification and redemption.

This dance form involves the use of pairs of bamboo poles horizontally held against the ground by male members sitting face to face on either sides. They open and close the bamboo poles in rhythmic beats in imitation of the movements of birds and sometimes the swaying of trees. The dancers move by stepping alternatively in and out, to the beat of the bamboo poles with ease and grace.

Khuallam is the dance of the guest. In Mizo language Khual means guest, while lum means dancing. According to the pre-Christian belief the soul after death goes either to Pialral or Paradise, or Mithi Khua, a land of sorrow depending on his work. One has to do good work like hunting or work of distinction or war and for that ceremonies like Khuangchawi were required to be performed. During that ceremony guests from nearby villages were invited. On reaching the place of the ceremony the guests used to perform Khuallam dance in traditional Mizo clothes, Puandum to the accompaniment of Darbu, a set of gongs.

Chheih lam is a dance of joy performed with a song called Chheih hla sung to the beat of a drum or bamboo tube or just clapping of hands. During this dance the people squat on the floor in a circle, while the dancers stand in the middle with various

movements of limbs, and sing a song. Chheihlam is normally performed in the evening after the day's work is over.

Chai, Rallu Lam, Solakia and Sarlamkai are some of the impressive dances of the Mizos. Another attractive dance Par-Lam, reminds one of the enchanting beauty of the hills and streams rippling along. In Par-Lam the girls colourfully dressed with flowers tucked in their hair dance with waving of hands and singing charming tunes.

Mizoram is now at the crossroads of history. Virtually a no industry state with meager infrastructure, it depends on shifting cultivation. The State has 9288.29 Square Kilometers of cultivable land for agriculture. Contour Farming System has been introduced to wean away the farmers from shifting cultivation. The main constraint is lack of water in the dry season restricting double cropping. The State Government announced the Industry policy in 1989. The aim is to set up Industrial Estates in major centres like Aizawl, Kolasib Lunglei, Chawngte Vairabi and West Phaileng. An Industrial Growth Centre is also in the process.

The Mizos are now looking to the future. The contours and process of this transformation provide an interesting piece of history. In 1901 the percentage of Christians was only 0.8. Today after just one hundred years, most of the Mizos are Christians-over 86 per cent. Yet they have many of their tribal values like egalitarianism, the spirit of Tlawmngaihna'. There has been a remarkable revival of the worthwhile festivals, dances and other cultural tenets. They have evolved a socio-political structure by which the five major tribal groups, namely Lushai, Lakhers, Chakmas, Riangs and Pawis, and other smaller sub-tribes have come under a pan-Mizo identity. The common appellation of a land where the bamboo flowers with a premonition of famines and immense sufferings for the people is now a thing of the past. It was a horrible spectre of flowering of bamboos, followed by unprecedented increase in rat population and consequent havoc on the standing crops leading to famine. Mautam and Thingtam named after bamboo species recur periodically at intervals of fifty years. The specter no longer haunts the people of the Phawngpui, the Blue Mountain and the valleys of the Tlawng, Chhimtuipui, Khawthlang Tuipui and Tuivawl rivers.

The Mizos have discovered their roots in the past. The landscape

abounding in relics of the historical past like Lamsial Puk, or the caves of human bones, Lianchhiari Lunglen tlang, Mangkhaia Lung, Thasiama Se No neihna, Sibuta Lung, Sikpui Lung, Chhura Chi Rawt Lung and Darthiangi Lung speak volumes of the past deeds of the Mizos. They revel in music and their enchanting tunes reverberate in the hills, valleys and the meandering rivers. Their artistic sense is reflected in the exquisite designs of the Puans, the dress of the Mizo women, with beautiful colour matching and embroidered work. It is indeed called the pride of Mizoram.

The Mizos are jovial and hard working in tune with their land of myriad hues, sparkling flora and fauna and the rugged mountains. The unique code of ethics—‘tlawmngaihna’--selfless service for others and ‘hnatlang’--voluntary community work--guides their approach to life. Matured by vicissitudes of history they are confident and forward looking, a veritable part of the Indian mainstream.

THE NAGA CANVAS

NAGALAND WITH A majestic landscape and scenic grandeur has a chequered history. With hill ranges varying between 700mts and 4000mts in height, it has an area of 16,488 sq kms. A number of rivers passing through the Brahmaputra Valley have their sources in the Naga Hills. The vegetation also has unique diversity, from Alpine to Sub Himalayan, from tropical to temperate species, with abounding evergreen beauty. The people are divided into more than 20 major tribes and sub-tribes. The prominent among them include the Konyaks, the Aos, the Semas, the Angamis, the Chakesangs, the Pochuris, the Sangtams, the Lothas, the Changs, the Phoms, the Yimchungers, the Khenmugams, the Rengmas, the Zeliangs and the Kukis.

These tribes have their own dialects. The Nagas, particularly the articulate sections pleaded before the Simon Commission for a separate dispensation for them to maintain an exclusive identity. In fact, the rising elite decided to form an association to articulate the problems to the British and make efforts to solve them through consultations. The new Association, 'Naga Club' gradually took political overtones and became a force. It was the precursor of the Naga National Council, which came into existence through another transformation, Naga Hills District Tribal Council. The Naga Hills District Tribal Council was formed in Feb 1945, with an ostensible purpose of uniting the Nagas and repairing some of the damages suffered during the Second World War. Subsequently it changed its name into 'Naga National Council' to express their political aspirations. Despite a number of negotiations between Naga National Council and the then Governor of Assam there was no agreement and the militant section with Mr. A.Z. Phizo started campaign to remain outside the Indian Union. In 1956, they set up a so-called Naga Federal Government, which heralded a chapter of unrest in the Naga Hills. The violence continued for some time and then a section of the Nagas formed a Naga Peace Committee (NPC) with an



Orchid - Mizoram



Traditional gun-powder horns - Mizoram



A thatched jhum house — “Thtam” - Mizoram



Traditional wooden utensils - Mizoram



Augami dancer of Nagaland



Part of the world war II cemetery in Kohima - Nagaland



Lotha couple ready to dance - Nagaland

appeal to give up the policy of armed rebellion. The first Naga Peoples' Convention stressed the need for a negotiated settlement of the Naga problem. Under the aegis of this NPC, started a series of negotiations between the Government and these Naga leaders. This gave an impetus to all the peace loving people in the Naga Hills and a number of rebels came over-ground. A second NPC was held at Ungma and a memorandum on the political demands was prepared. Subsequently a third NPC held in Oct 1959, finalized the memorandum, which inter-alia spoke of the demand for a full-fledged State within the Indian Union to be known as 'Nagaland'.

The NPC delegation started negotiation with the Government of India in July 1960 and the then Prime Minister on August 1, 1960 announced in Parliament, the decision of carving out a new State of the Indian Republic to be composed of Naga Hills and Tuensang. The new State came into being on December 1, 1963.

Even after the Statehood, the activities of the rebels did not end. The responsibility of maintaining law and order in the Naga Hills including the Tuensang area had earlier been handed over to the Army. The NNC, the rebel outfit, the Federal Government of Nagaland and its militia were declared unlawful and the State of Nagaland was shifted from the Jurisdiction of the External Affairs Ministry to the Home Ministry. The rebel leaders, Mr. A.Z. Phizo and Mr. Kaito Sema left India. In 1975, a landmark event happened--a number of underground leaders came over-ground and surrendered arms following the signing of what is known as Shillong Accord. These leaders agreed to work within the framework of the Constitution of India. The leaders of NNC like Mr. Phizo, Mr. Issac Chist Swu and T. Muivah rejected the Shillong Accord. Subsequently differences cropped up among the underground leaders and the NNC broke up into two factions. In 1980 Issac C Swu and T Muivah formed the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN), which was popularly known as the eastern faction, while the group under Phizo was labeled as the western faction. The NSCN further broke up with another outfit known as Khaplang's NSCN (K) Group. With Phizo's death in 1990, the NNC has practically gone down and the main rebel faction now is the NSCN. Negotiations are on with them through the emissary nominated by the government of India.

In Nagaland the story is not that of strife and tension alone. Beneath this unrest and turmoil ran a veritable flow of social change.

The most important one is the crystallization of a Naga identity. The Process of identity redefinition of the twenty odd tribes and sub-tribes under the pan Naga fold signals an adaptive mechanism to the changing environment born out of expansion of communication network and technology. Roy Burman narrated a story, where he said that when he asked a girl in a school which community she belonged to, a boy said she was a Naga, before she could give any answer. But she got furious and retorted: No I am a Lotha and not a Naga. The incident happened as late as 1953. So it is apparent that it took quite some time to get the Naga identity crystallized fully.

A search for internal unity comes in a situation when the barriers of contact with other tribes are removed, though slowly and then the traditions, the myths, which are almost similar, become the binding force. The result is what the social scientists describe as ethnic territorial mobilization. The people cutting across smaller identities identify themselves with the territory and in fact invest it with 'an aura of sacredness'. This is exactly what has happened in Nagaland. Some social scientists say that the situation gave birth to a kind of local nationalism, which passed through the stages of 'infra-nationalism' and a later consolidation of the identity in the form of 'proto-nationalism' where a conscious elite emerges as a major force to reckon with.

The Nagas are being exposed to major forces of change and social reconstruction. A number of forces are at work. Spread of education, urbanization, scientific management of forests, codification of customary laws and functioning of the organs of Parliamentary democracy and local self-government are some of the factors and experiments being undertaken in Nagaland, which paved the way for a new ambience and social structure. This changed the world-view of the people. As a writer said, 'Fifty years ago the people of Waromung, an Ao Naga village, primarily belonged to Waromung alone. With tenuous exceptions, they mattered no more to the outside world, than do many freaks of nature matter to us today. In 1962 the same people lived at Waromung, but the frontier of their life was not the same. It was humanity itself.'

This expansion of identity signals not merely the internal process of integration among the tribes, but also an urge towards a role in the mainstream of the Indian polity. Herein lies the essence of the Naga consolidation though accompanied by occasional stresses and strains of adjustment.

So, the Nagas have been subjected to a variety of outside influences. As Haimendorf has put it: 'The dilemma with which they are now faced is not in the failure of the efforts of the government to raise their standards of living and change their outlook, but in their very success of opening the Naga society to the modern world'. Half a century ago the people of a village belonged to that village alone. Today the scenario has changed perhaps beyond recognition. The same people no doubt lived in the same village. But the horizon of their life has expanded and that enshrines the fascinating saga of the people.

Christianity came to the Nagas as a new force. The first school and chapel were set up by Dr. Miles Bronson, an American Baptist Missionary at a Konyak Naga village at Namsang in 1838. But within a couple of years the project was abandoned because of continued ill health of Dr. Bronsang. After over three decades the missionary work started in the Ao area in 1871. Later another mission was set up by the American Baptist Mission for the villages inhabited by the Angamis. Apart from the first missionaries like Rev. E.W.Clark and S.W. Rivenburg, the local converts were also active in the evangelization of the Ao and Angami dominated areas. The Gospel spread to different parts of the Naga Hills, though with a slow start. Subsequently in late forties of the last century, the Roman Catholic Church entered the field and began evangelic, educational and humanitarian work. Now Christianity has struck deep roots in Nagaland and brought about significant changes in the Naga life and thought. Initially the Missionaries used the Assamese language for teaching and preaching work. Later they adopted the local dialects using the Roman script. In the schools, English was also taught along with encouragement to the Naga dialects written in Roman script. The American Baptists provided medical services to the sick creating an interest in modern medicines. So came the teaching of English, spread of education and a written shape to the Naga dialects and thus a sense of solidarity among various groups of the Nagas.

The gradual spread of Christianity has also discouraged the traditional pre-Christian practices and rituals, thereby keeping the people away from their roots. Christian hymns and western songs replaced the traditional music, war songs and festivities including community feasts. It has got the effect of destroying the Naga ways of living. People almost forgot the rituals, which their ancestors had

observed zealously. But things started changing with a more sensible policy 'which is prepared to preserve all that is good in the old customs so long as it is not inconsistent with Christian teaching.' Moreover, various aspects of the old life pattern like the land relationship pattern, customary laws, the system of the Chiefs and the village council were kept practically intact. This helped the emerging elite revive the traditional socio-political institutions and the indigenous culture of the Nagas. After Independence, the churches in Nagaland are maintained by the Naga Baptists who are no less interested in preserving the essential Naga culture. Christianity in that case is bound to be 'Naga in form and content'.

The origin of the generic name Naga is interesting. It is strange that the word was not in general use and the tribes and sub-tribes used to refer to themselves by their individual tribe names. In all probability the people from the plains used this word Naga to refer to the people from the hills. Dr. Hutton who is considered an authority on the Nagas is of the view that the word could be a corrupt form of the Assamese word 'Noga' meaning mountaineer. Erward Gait said that the term might have been derived from 'Nok', which means folk in some of the tribal dialects. Verrier Elwin thinks that the term Naga might have been derived from 'Non' or people, used in a few languages of the Tibeto-Burman group. The Kacharis are believed to call them 'Nahngra', meaning warrior or fighter. This evolution of the generic name to cover the heterogeneous tribes and sub-tribes is part of the growth of integration and an underlying unity.

The Nagas were generally outside the purview of the Indian freedom movement, which was part of the struggle against the colonial subjugation. This was just not because the Nagas lived in isolation but was also due to the persistent efforts of the British administration to keep the Nagas secluded from the mainstream of India. The Naga Hills District was formed in 1866 under the charge of a Deputy Commissioner. Initially the district comprised a portion of the hills with Angami, Zeliang and Kuki villages. Later other areas were gradually added to the district and the process of consolidation continued till 1957 when the Tuensang Frontier Division was added to the Naga Hills District. The State now is bounded by Assam on the north and the west, by Myanmar and Arunachal on the east and Manipur on the south. Full of mountain ranges, the Barail range, the

Kohima hills and the Naga ranges, the topography breaks into several ridges and valleys.

After the Statehood the first general election was held to the Nagaland National Assembly in 1964. Election was held for forty seats of the forty-six members House. The remaining six seats were filled by Tuensang Regional Council from amongst its members. The number of Assembly seats went up to sixty after the re-organization of the administrative set up in 1973. The existing districts—Kohima, Mokokchung and Tuensang were further divided into seven districts. Phek was carved out of Kohima district. Wokha and Zunheboto from Mokokchung and Mon from Tuensang district. The major tribe wise distribution of population among these seven districts is as follows:

Kohima	→	Angami, Rengma, Zeliang, Kachari, and Kuki
Phek	→	Chakesang and Pochuri
Wokha	→	Lotha
Zunheboto	→	Sema
Mokokchung	→	Ao
Tuensang	→	Chang, Phom, Sangtam, Khiemungam and Yimchunger
Mon	→	Konyak.

During the elections, the political process over the years in Nagaland have shown keen competition among the various forces and parties. This has ultimately strengthened the democratic structure of the Naga society.

The tribes known under the generic name, Naga have different customs, festivals, habits, practices and dialects. However, over a period of time various forces and factors worked to bring about an integrationist approach in them. With this, and the outside influences in particular, has come a significant transformation of their life-style. The Naga society has now opened to the modern world. It is, however, not free from an inherent dilemma. There has been a sizable increase in government jobs and other public projects. But the pattern of production of the Nagas, the traditional method of cultivation like Jhumming has only marginally changed, which does

not generate enough marketable surplus. In some cases there has been a rise in standard of living without necessary transformation of their economy. All the tribes and sub-tribes have obviously faced many contradictory pulls and pressure of circumstances with occasional stresses and strains to their socio-political system.

The Ao and Angami tribes were exposed to the outside influences—the British and Christianity. The first village and Mission schools were set up in those areas and their dialects were also reduced to writing. The term 'Ao' is considered to be a mispronunciation of 'Aor', which means those who came across the Dikhu, while the term 'Mirir' means those who did not come across the Dikhu. The 'Mirir' is used for the tribes-Sangtams, Changs, Phoms and Konyaks.

The Ao Nagas are divided into three groups—Chongli, Mongsen and Changki representing different waves of the migrants speaking different dialects.

The history of the different Naga tribes settling in the present area of habitat has not yet been unanimously established. Most probably there were different waves of migration and the story is not uniform for all the tribes constituting the Naga ethnic constellation. There are distinct traces of Mon-Khymer language in place names and river names. However, despite the Negrito, Austric and other racial traits, it is the Indo-Mongoloid influence, which is the most dominant one.

The Konyaks mostly living in Mon district in the northeast corner of the State are an important tribe and an ethnic group. Their social life revolves round a powerful Chief, called 'Angs' and a village council. The council enforces customary laws and settles disputes, and performs judicial functions. Another useful institution is the 'morung' or men's house. A 'morung' consists of either one clan or several clans bound by ties of kinship. A Konyak's first loyalty is to his 'morung'. Like other Naga tribes the marriage among the Konyaks is based on the principle of clan exogamy and monogamy is mandatory among the commoners except the Chief. The Konyak festivals are organised according to the agricultural year. One festival called 'Ouniebu' is celebrated at the beginning of harvest, while 'Aoling Monyu' is held in the first week of April, which is performed

to herald the New Year. The festivals are accompanied by war dances, singing victory songs and prayer for protection of the village.

The introduction of money economy and many other changes brought about by the administration has enlarged the setting for social interaction. The expansion of communication and contacts is the key factor in this process of modernization and development. The revised attitude of the Christians to the non-Christian way of life has brought about a spirit of adaptation. As a writer pointed out; 'The new spirit is in action among the Konyaks as can be proved by the fact that the log-drum, the bachelor's dormitory and some other institutions are not only preserved but invested with a new significance for serving the modern needs.'

The Semas are also one of the major Naga tribes. In fact, considering the influence and number, they are next to the Aos and the Angamis. The Semas primarily inhabit the Zunheboto district. The important feature of the Semas is the Chieftain system and their migratory habit. They live in a settled village but often they are found to have broken away from the parent village and set up a new one. Generally a son of a Chief or an important person leaves with his followers and founds a new village. Sometimes that kind of new village is established not only in Sema area but also in non-Sema area. In such a situation the village gets its name from its founder who takes over as Chief. Marriage among the Semas takes place between two families of the same status. Elaborate rituals including bride price are practised.

With the spread of education and various development initiatives introduced by the government, the Sema society has been undergoing tremendous changes. Christianity is another potent influence on the society. The impact of acculturation is visible in every aspect of the socio-cultural and political life of the Semas.

For the Nagas, agriculture is the main stay of their economy. The tribes like Angami, Sema, Mao and Tangkhul follow terraced or wet cultivation, while many other tribes continue the practice of shifting cultivation of jhumming. Generally the Nagas including the Jhummiās live in permanent villages. Though in the beginning land was commonly held, with some of the tribes there is also private ownership. Primarily the village land is divided into two broad divisions: agricultural land and reserve land. The reserve land is further divided

into four categories; village land for public institutions like dormitory, graveyard, places of worship. This is the joint property of the villagers. Clan (khel) land; each Khel having an allotted site in the village. Lineage land, which is owned by a kin group. And then, individual land, which is either inherited or acquired land.

Haimendorf has painted an idealized picture of the tribal societies where 'adequate food supplies, a non-exploitative social structure, freedom from indebtedness' are the singular features. The tribal problems, the scholars sharing the above view argue, stem not from developments within the tribal societies, but from contact with the materially more advanced population. This view is, however, not wholly tenable as the internal factors as opposed to the romantic picture of the tribal societies are no less responsible and one should explore the sources of exploitation and inequality within the society itself. Nagaland is a State where the tribal population wields political power with the overwhelming majority of the tribal groups inhabiting the State. In the old societies the village government was based on the deep-rooted democratic traditions.

The village councils of most of the Naga tribes have elected members and in some cases all the villagers are members. The Chiefs of the Chakesang Nagas are even elected. The Angami Chief is removable by the people. The power of the Chiefs in some cases are limited and their decisions are subject to the approval of the members.

The Nagas have a very rich and colourful culture. People in some cases still believe in the pre-Christian pantheon, which dominates the forces of Nature and determines human destiny. Elaborate rituals mark worship and propitiation of the concerned gods and goddesses and the spirits. These rituals are related to the important events in human life-like birth, death, marriage and maternity. Even natural calamities are taken as expressions of God's anger and therefore appropriate rituals are performed. The Naga priests consult omens and determine the type of rituals to be performed in propitiation of the concerned gods. The gods and goddesses are embedded in the folk minds and sometimes symbols are enough. In the case of the Konyaks, secret incantations are chanted to a bamboo pole to propitiate the spirits.

In the Naga society like other tribal people, dance and music are

part of the folk traditions. Spontaneity is the hallmark not merely in the outpouring of music but in the body movements and harmonious footsteps. In an ecstatic expression, Haimendorf said: 'Are not the white clouds sweeping over the moon's face before a mighty wind, is not this play of light and shade in the heavens, a part of this same rhythm? Song and dance have become one, and they are one, too, with the rustle of the dark tops of the palms, the wild flaming fire, and the distant outline of the mountain peaks'.

The songs and dances of them are veritable rendering of the infinite moods. While depicting the moods of love, the vigorous Nagas dance with easy and graceful movements. Similarly in the case of war dances, the Semas jump into the air with daos in hands and war cries on the lips. Sounds from Nature are woven into the music. The dancers and musicians modulate their voices and movements according to the themes. Dr. Verrier Elwin referred to a love song being rendered by a Chakesang group gradually 'lowering their voices until it was as if each was whispering into the very ear of his beloved.'

The festivals like the seed sowing festival in which the god of crops is propitiated for a bumper harvest in spring create a joyful ambience. Weaving is part of the tradition and mythology being handed down from generation to generation. The Naga ceremonial costumes show a riot of colours symmetrically arranged. They weave with cotton, jute and various fibres. Different tribes with their respective geometrical models design the Naga products mostly striped. The same artistic sense is available in the cane and bamboo work.

The high position of women and their excellence in various spheres of activities is another significant feature of the Naga society and it is rightly said that many women in more civilized part of India might well envy the women of the Naga Hills. It is the cultural continuity that is essentially reflected in the songs, dances, customary rituals and overall delightful expression of joys by men and women. This spirit is sustained even to the present day despite all vicissitudes of history and the forces of change.

THE ENCHANTING TRIPURA

THE ENCHANTING TRIPURA is a land locked State marked by parallel hills straggling from the north to the south, green valleys with symphony of splashing water and dense forests in places. Five major and two minor ranges of hills running from north west to south east and separated from one another by beautiful valleys are the hallmark of its picturesque landscape. With an area of 10,477 sq. kms., the State is bounded by Bangladesh on the North, West, South and East with a common boundary of 832 kms. and linked to the rest of India through a narrow strip along Assam and Mizoram. There are three broad zones—the hill region, the flat plains and the river basin.

The land of Unakoti Tirtha and the Tripurasundari temple, Deotamura and Bhuvaneswari temple is the confluence of a variety of influences. Many streamlets like Gumati create white foamy symphony with continuous splashing of water. The beautiful Jampui Hills, Dumbur Falls, the meandering Khowai, the Manu, the Haorah and the Muhuri hold great attraction for the people. The Jampui Hills, popularly called, 'the seat of Permanent Spring' are home to some species of orchids and orange groves. The verdant beauty with spectacular sunrises and sunsets and the colourful people in the surrounding villages is indeed unique.

Jampui is one of the six principal ranges of hills—Baramura, Deotamura, Atharamura, Longtharai, Sardang and Jampuri fanning from North to South. Sixty five percent of the total area of Tripura is hilly land and the remaining thirty five percent flat land.

Tripura is believed to have derived its name either from the deity—Tripureswari or Tuipra, a word in the tribal dialect meaning water ('Tui' means Water and 'Pra' means Near i.e., the land adjoining water) or from the name of the tribe itself Tiprai. The kingdom enjoyed a special status with no treaty obligations with the British. The British conquered Tripura in 1761. But no Political Agent was appointed there until 1871. Tripura's accession to India after Independence was signed with the consent of the ruling dynasty.

The account of Tripura's early history is shrouded in myths. 'Rajamala' particularly in respect of the period witnessed by the writers are reliable, while the observations on the earlier period require corroboration from other sources.

The Royal Dynasty of Tripura ruled for a long time. On many occasions, the schemes of conquests by others floundered on the rock of Tripuri resistance. Legends abound about the effective intervention by the queen Tripura Sundari against the Sultan of Gauda. The reign of Ratna Manikya and Dharma Manikya are eventful. Dhanya Manikya has been acclaimed the greatest of all Tripuri Kings and his major achievement is the battle against Hussein Shah of Bengal in which many soldiers of Hussein Shah met with watery graves in the river Gumati. Vijaya Manikya also defeated the army sent by Sulaiman Kirani of Bengal under Mubarak Khan.

Thereafter the British spread their influence to various areas in the northeast and during the rule of Krishna Manikya it so happened that the British Paramountcy began in Tripura. The Tripura king and the Faujdar of the Nawab of Bengal fought over some matters of revenue collection in 'Chakla Rosnavad'. The British Governor in Bengal did not miss the opportunity to extend the British sway to Tripura. A resident was subsequently appointed. The subsequent rulers—Bir Chandra Manikya and Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya were benevolent and their reign very eventful.

The emergence of a composite culture in Tripura is primarily because of a mixed population—both tribal and non-tribal. The Tripuris, the Reangs, the Jamatias, the Chakmas, the Halams, the Noatias and the Mogs are the major constituents of the total tribal component of the population of 20 different categories. Among the non-tribal population, the Bengali-speaking people are the largest. In fact, the migration of the Bengali speaking population started in Tripura from 1941. After partition, the subjects of Tripura Rajas in Chaklas Roshanabad came on an unprecedented scale to this landlocked State. The constant flow of homeless people from the erstwhile East Pakistan was a regular phenomenon. This inter-mixture of population resulted in the process of a composite culture in embracing the different strands of faith. Various influences—the Hindu, the Buddhist and the Islamic have created an atmosphere of integration on the cultural plane. The influence of Vaishnavism is quite distinct among some sections of the Jamatia, the Naotia and the Reang, of

course, in a mixed form. However, the main fabric of Tripura's society is 'an active reflection of certain image, and that is nothing but the respect for the language and the culture of Bengal'. Initially this was confined within the Royal Palace but subsequently it took deep roots among the common men and this transfusion left deep imprint on different aspects of the tribal ways of living. The cultural links however gradually became a two-way traffic in reaching the heritage of both the tribal and non-tribal population.

So 'Tripura is a real amalgam of cultures. It is here that the Bodo culture still blooms meaningful amidst the sophisticated songs of Tagore that one hears so often'. The tribals overlap each other and cannot easily be classified. However, they are considered to belong to the Kuki Chin language group and the Tripuri group.

This amalgam is both an opportunity and a challenge born out of rapid demographic changes and the resultant problem of ethnic adjustment. The proportion of tribal population has come down from 50.26 per cent in 1931 to 28.44 in 1981 and slightly further less in 2001 following continuous migration. The current population of the state according to 2001 census is 31,91,168. This problem has given birth to further political and economic dualism centred around the tribal-non-tribal dichotomy. There has been stratification of the tribal societies and deepening of the crisis of the tribal economy with socio-political ramifications.

The Tripura Kingdom signed the instrument of accession—the Tripura Merger Agreement on September 9, 1949 and Tripura acceded to the Indian Union on October 15 the same year. It became a part-C state ruled by a Chief Commissioner on behalf of the President of India. Following the reorganization of State in 1956, Tripura became a Centrally Administered Territory. Subsequently, a legislative assembly and Council of Ministers was provided. The status of the administrator was raised from the Chief Commissioner to the Lieutenant Governor. Tripura became a full-fledged state on 21 January 1972 with the implementation of the North-Eastern Areas (Reorganization) Act, 1971 and the necessary follow up administrative reorganization was carried out.

As already mentioned, different cultural layers and strands met and mingled into one another forming the warp and woof of a scintillating pattern. This may not be at all without stresses and

strains because of a number of socio-economic and political factors. The dominant tribe Tripuri is also a tribe in transition. The rulers of Tripura claim their ancestry to Chandra dynasty. The *Rajamala* of Tripura deals with the chronicles of this ruling dynasty. The historical account of Tripura, however, can be taken from 15th century when King Dharma Manikya requisitioned the services of Durlabhendra and two other scholars Sukresvara and Banesvara to compile this *Rajamala*. The reign of Dharma Manikya (1431-1462) is an important landmark in the history of Tripura. His rule is marked by a socio-cultural upheaval and also various military adventures. Dhanya Manikya (1463-1515) is considered to be the most prominent of all Tripuri kings who was not merely a conqueror but also a builder and a social reformer. The Tripuris are more or less the autochthons of the State belonging to the Boro group of Tibeto-Burman race. They are mainly distributed in both the cultural regions on the hills and on the plains. The Tripuris in the plains live in the urban as well as semi-urban areas and their socio-economic changes in the last few decades are remarkable. The Tripuris settled in the hilltops or on the top of the hillocks, generally live in small groups while the plain Tripuris live in the multi ethnic villages. Tripuri is an endogamous group and is divided into a number of exogamous divisions. The dialect of the Tripuris is highly influenced by the Bengali language and they have come under the fold of the Hindu culture. Some of them have even showing interest towards Vaishnavism. Their festivals and the local deities and even their pattern of worship have been deeply influenced by the dominant neighbouring groups of people. The Tripuris worship the deities "CHADDADAS DEVATA" (14 gods and goddesses). They also observe annual festival of 'Kharchi' and 'Ker'. There is a dichotomy to the extent that they follow their local tribal rituals and also various Hindu religious ceremonies.

The second biggest group among the tribal communities of Tripura is the Reangs. They also belong to the Mongoloid stock and their dialect—'Polong' has been classified as belonging to the Austro-Asiatic group. The Reangs are divided into two broad categories—Meskha or Mechka and Marchhai or Malchhni. They migrated from a place near Myanmar border along the Chittagong Hill Tracts (now in Bangladesh) and settled in Tripura in the fourteenth century during the rule of Ratna Manikya. The Reangs have a well-defined system of governance with the Rai, Chapiakhan, Chapia and Rai Kachak. The head of the community is Rai and his Chief Minister is Rai

Kachak. Chapiakhan is next to Rai in the line of succession. Next to Chapiakhan is Chapia. The Rai is not a hereditary ruler. The people through a democratic process select the leaders. These three functionaries form some sort of Supreme Council to run the administration. The Rai is also assisted by Darkalam, the chief Priest, Dalui, the counselor, Bhandari, the store-Keeper, Kanda, the attendant, Daya Hazara, the drum beater, Muria, the flutist, Dugria and Daoa, the musicians and Saikrak, the distributor of meat after the ceremonies. The Rai enjoys authority and influence over the people within his jurisdiction.

The Reang family unit is the joint family consisting of father, mother, and their unmarried children. In some cases the brothers are also staying together with their families. The oldest male member is the head of such a family. He is, in fact the custodian of the family tradition. In the Reang society the family is integrated with the village headed by a headman who wields authority over the people of the village like the senior most member in his family. The Rai on his part heads the social and political hierarchy of the Reangs and he integrates them with the political structure.

The Reang's pantheon is quite large with many gods and goddesses. The system of worship consists of both Hindu practices and animistic rites. Now-a-days there is some Christian segment among the tribe because of the influence of the Christian Missions. The tribe still follows the annual ritual of congregation at some places to celebrate the worship of 'Tripura Sundari' or Lakshmi, or Ker, or goddess of the river. It is more of a social get-together than a religious festival. The whole community takes part and indulges in songs, dances, feast and merry-making. The festival spreads the message of love and brotherhood and is sustained by the community contribution called 'Khain'.

Tripura's economy is primarily agrarian and before 1949 there was self-sufficiency in food grains. But with the rise in population, it became a food deficit State. In a situation of subsistence economy and with lower economic aspirations, Tripura did not face the problem emanating from severe limitation of resources. The economic scenario started changing with the rapid demographic transformation. Measures were initiated to make agriculture more extensive as well as intensive. One more challenge was settling the jhummys through sedentary cultivation. In fact, the Mahraje Birbikram Manikya

earmarked a chunk of land in 1941 and 1943 for this purpose. However, the systematic efforts to settle the Jhummys began in the middle of First Five Year Plan from 1953-54 onwards. Initially, the Jhummy rehabilitation strategy suffered from some shortcomings like absence of simultaneous provision of certain infrastructure and basic facilities like drinking water, health and education in the resettlement colonies. Moreover, there was some resistance among the Jhummys against any change in their way of living.

Some scholars have even said that the shifting cultivation has become a way of life of the Jhummys and their society, polity and culture are all 'based on this form of agricultural practice'. Today the situation has changed. Earlier the land for jhumming was available in plenty, and the population to be supported was small. There was no alternative technology for cultivation on the hill slopes. It was quite natural that jhumming moulded the tribal institutions and culture. So the change in occupational pattern of the jhummys, many apprehended, would not be smooth or even readily acceptable to them. But consistent efforts and campaign by the government and other agencies over a period of time made it possible for even the jhummys to generate higher income from non-traditional occupations like settled cultivation, plantation and horticulture. This change may be attributed primarily to the fact that jhumming is no longer economically viable and alternative means of livelihood are available with the people. Notwithstanding a close relationship between jhumming and their way of life, there are marked signs for the settled cultivation to be a gradually more viable option for the erstwhile jhummys.

The socio-economic dualism as reflected in the alienation of tribal land and a rapid demographic change has created stagnation and crisis in the tribal economy. After many deliberations, a political and administrative solution was chalked out. This led to the creation of Tribal Autonomous District Council for the predominantly tribal areas of the State. The Council was initially constituted in January 1982 by an Act of the State Legislature. Subsequently Parliament amended the Constitution to get this institution covered in the Sixth Schedule and then the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council was constituted under it in July 1985. The Council comprises over sixty eight per cent of the State area, but only about thirty per cent of the total population. The total number of the tribal population

covered, was, however, over seventy six per cent. The administrative, legal and financial powers of the Autonomous District Council are as mentioned in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, but it functioned as an institution of tribal development. The main aim of this Council is reduction of spatial and ethnic inequality and integration of Tripura's socio-economic structure. The Council faces an uphill task, as this inequality between the plains and the hills, between the non-tribal people and the tribal population is the creation of complex forces of history, and the facts of geography.



Angami cultivation dance - Nagaland



North East view of the AO Baptist church
at Mokokchung - Nagaland



A tribal woman of Tripura



The Reang dance of Tripura



Neermahal, the water palace in the midst of Rudrasagar lake
was built by Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya
in 1930 - Tripura



Typical tribal dance of Tripura

GEOGRAPHIC COMPULSIONS

THE REGION WITH Seven States has broadly three divisions from the physiographic point of view, namely, Meghalaya Plateau, the North Eastern Hills & Basin and the Brahmaputra Valley. The North Eastern Hills & Basin account for 65 percent of the total area, while the Brahmaputra Valley and Meghalaya Plateau represent 22 percent and 13 percent of the area respectively.

The geographic compulsions are primarily responsible for the common destiny of the region. Meghalaya, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh are dependant on Assam, even for their internal transportation and communications. Mizoram and Manipur have a linkage with the rest of the country through the Barak Valley. Tripura, surrounded largely by a foreign country—Bangladesh has also to maintain transport link with Assam for its existence. The interdependence can be seen even in the fact that any meaningful economic programme has to involve more than one State. The rivers in Assam Plains have their sources in Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland, while some of the Manipur rivers originate in Nagaland and Mizoram. When power is in demand in one State, the economic resources may be available in another. The hydroelectric potential, mineral and forest resources are in abundance. Forests cover over 60 percent of the geographical area of the region. High precipitation with mountainous terrains has made it a habitat of a large number of forest tree species. The economies of the hills and the plains are mutually dependant on one another. Even issues like flood control have to be addressed in more than one State. The hills have to depend on the plains for marketing their products, for food grains, supplies and host of other economic necessities. This calls for integration of the economy of the Seven States.

The northeast region is one the twelve mega spots of biodiversity in the world. There is a plethora of flora and fauna. With such a variety, the region is an ideal place for naturalists and

zoologists. Various climatic conditions, differences in altitudes and numerous water bodies like streams, lakes, rivers and swamps have created this rich diversity. Nearly half of the Indian plants are found in this region. The dominant families of flowering plants of this region are Orchidaceae, Pouceae, Fabaceae, Asteraceae, Cyperaceae, Euphorbiaceae, Rubiaceae, Lamiaceae, Acanthaceae and Zingiberaceae. Many plants with phytogeographical distinctiveness are found in this region only. A number of endemic plants are also available apart from many common tropical plants. The deciduous forests are marked by continuous stretches of Sals. Tall grasses, to the height even 4 to 5 metres are found in tropical grasslands along the banks of the rivers Brahmaputra and Manas. Swamp forests and marsh are plentifully available. These grasslands on the banks of the Brahmaputra are different from those of the high altitudes of the Shillong Plateau and the areas of North Cachar Hills and Karbi Anglong Hills. There are many other plants in the tropical areas and associated plants in the sub tropical rain forests. Rhododendron predominates the temperate vegetation of the region. There are also the Alpine and sub-Alpine vegetation in various areas. The region is home to a variety of traditional medicinal plants. Meghalaya for example, is known as the homeland for many varieties of grasses and wild medicinal plants, red and lateritic soil and tropical moist deciduous forests.

The region has an abundance of mineral wealth. The coalfields in Sibsagar and Dibrugarh areas of Assam in the 'belt of Schuppen', in North Cachar Hills, Karbi Anglong Hills, Khasi and Jaintia Hills indicate rich reserve of coal in the region. Extensive deposits of Limestone, at times with Dolomite, are found in Lohit and Siang of Arunachal Pradesh, in Garampani area of North Cachar Hills district in Assam, on the elongated belt along the southern borders of Khasi Hills district, Mawmleh-Mawsmat Hills near Cherapunji, Nongklieh and other areas in Jaintia Hills, in the Southern slope of Tura Range near Siju Arteka and Siju Songmang in Garo Hills, Ukhrul area in Manipur and Tuensang District in Nagaland.

There is also a reserve of Magnetite in Nagaland with Ultramafic rocks. Many base metals containing copper, lead, zinc and cobalt have also been explored in Subansiri district of Arunachal. There are areas in Nagaland and Manipur and also in Meghalaya, where base metal Sulphides have been traced. Fire clay has also been found in the Karbi

Anglong Hills of Assam. Occurrences of Plastic clay and China Clay have been reported from various areas in Tripura and Meghalaya.

The Territory in the region, with spatial distribution over nearly half of its total area, has immense mineral potential. Extensive deposits of limestone, coal and lignite, oil and natural gas and clay are naturally found in a number of areas far and wide apart.

Sericulture has become part and parcel of the culture of the region. It is believed that the ancient Kings of Assam gave liberal patronage to its advancement, with every village house having an obligation to rear and weave silk fabric. In fact the silk fabric got the status of national dress for the average Assamese and became common costume for the women in particular. Because of the favorable climatic condition, both mulberry and non-mulberry silk worms are reared in Assam and all over the State. Eri and Muga culture are considered to be indigenous to Assam. Mulberry silk culture has become an agro industry par excellence. Sualkuchi is an important village on the banks of Brahmaputra where silk weaving is widely prevalent with thousands of handlooms round the year. Efforts are on to increase the production of the local silk to meet the demand of Mulberry silk and the industry.

The Mulberry silk industry assumes importance under the Rural Employment Generation Scheme, particularly among the weaker sections of society. Silk is also an excellent foreign exchange earner.

With enormous latent potential and vast forest resources, the region lacks any significant mineral, forest and agro based industries. The resource base for industrial development is really enviable. There are 52 varieties of Bamboos in Assam alone and many types of Reeds used for manufacturing paper pulp and rayon. The horticultural crops like Banana, Pineapples, Citrus, Palms, Apples, Tea, Jute, Sugarcane are also abundant with Agro-industrial potential. Even the livestock population has bright prospects in the field of village industries. These vast and varied resources require a coordinated approach for their full utilization and also to overcome the constraints like poor transport and communication system and non-availability of cheap and adequate power.

One can easily see the huge potential of hydro-electric power in the region. According to an estimate, the exploitable potential

comes to 63,257 MW while the region at this point of time generates only 1011 MW. This is an area, which needs to be exploited for balanced development with a concerted action for spatial distribution of resources and consumption centers.

The growth rate in the region can have a quantum jump only with modernization of agriculture and allied activities. This will require development of infrastructure and transport system. After the partition in 1947, the region was virtually cut off from the rest of the country with disruption in river transport and a longer rail link. The length of the railways in Assam is quite short and is not adequate to provide transport support for petroleum, tea and other products of the region. This is a common concern for the region as a whole, with poor trans-shipment facilities. Any individual constituent cannot overcome these infrastructural shortcomings. The intensification of the development activities is a must and the States in the region must have a coordinated programme in different spheres of life.

The main bottleneck for development in agriculture is low productivity and the practice of shifting cultivation, popularly known as *Jhumming* in the hills. *Jhumming* is the slash and burn method of cultivation. In the earlier days, this system worked well with a balance between population and soil fertility. There was a larger fallow cycle of 20-30 years, while the present cycle has been reduced to 3-6 years because of overwhelming pressure on land. According to a report, the area under shifting cultivation is 4.37 million hectares. The National Remote Sensing Agency has given the figure of 4.24 million hectares under shifting cultivation. The practice of *Jhumming* has harmful effects with large-scale soil erosion, siltation and incidence of floods in the plains. The flora and fauna is also affected to a great extent. The degradation of natural resources and other effects urgently call for suitable alternatives to this age-old system.

Any action plan for development has to include horticulture, fishery, forestry and animal husbandry as well. The Watershed Management Programme with soil conservation measures is vital. The region as a whole with its undulating topography, wide range of altitudes, varying rainfall and climates and specific land use on the slopes of the hills can prosper only under the Common Integrated Programme. Various *Jhum* control programmes and setting up of

agro-based industries would be a suitable alternative. They would generate potential for development of subsidiary industries.

The region requires a human perspective and as it was pointed out, 'the first principle of development is coordinated development'. It cannot be truer elsewhere than in the northeastern region.

THE NORTHEAST COUNCIL

THE NORTH EASTERN Council came into being along with the reorganization of the northeastern areas. It was not, however, without teething troubles. The reorganization legislation had to wait till a decision about coordinated economic development of the region was taken to satisfy the political aspirations of different people of the region. The North Eastern Areas Reorganization Act of 1971 and the North Eastern Council Act of 1971 are the twin products of the initiative of the Government.

The predecessor bill, the North Eastern Council Bill of 1969, which was made an Act in 1970, generated misgivings about the very function and utility of such a regional organization. After discussions with various States of the region, the bill was rehashed and an amended bill was passed by Parliament in December 1971 followed by the Presidential assent on August 1, 1972. The Council was inaugurated at Shillong on November 7, 1972. Nagaland, which had some reservations, finally joined the Council in 1976. The primary purpose of this Council was the development of the region for better human welfare. It is not a super government. Nor does it curtail the power to the States in any manner. It is an advisory and not a supervisory body. As the then Prime Minister said, "it does not alter the relationship of the member units with the Central Government. The Central Government will not use the Council to interfere with the affairs and functioning of various Governments of the region". The NEC was described as an index of the Central Government's concern for the development of a neglected region.

The functions of the Council as mentioned in the Act centre around the necessity of a fast and balanced socio-economic development of the entire region, through a regional planning with a special set of priorities suited to the felt needs. The Schemes and projects in the regional plan are expected to open new avenues of further growth and promotion of local economy. The principal functions of the Council in the exact words of the Statute are:

1. "The Council shall be an advisory body and may discuss any matter in which some or all the States represented in that Council, or the Union and one or more of the States represented in that Council have a common interest and advise the Central Government and the Government of each State concerned as to the action to be taken on any such matter, and in particular, may discuss and make recommendations with regard to:-

- (i) Any matter of common interest in the field of economic and social planning;
- (ii) Any matter concerning inter-State transport and communications.
- (iii) Any matter relating to power or flood control projects of common interest;

2. For securing the balanced development of the northeastern area, the Council shall forward proposals:-

- (a) Formulating for the States represented in the Council a united and co-coordinated regional plan (which will be in addition to the State plan) in regard to matters of common importance to that area.
- (b) Regarding the priorities of the projects and schemes included in the regional plan and the stages in which the regional plan may be implemented, and
- (c) Regarding the location of the projects and schemes included in the regional plan to the Central Government for its consideration.

3. The Council shall-

- (a) review, from time to time the implementation of the projects and schemes included in the regional plan and recommend measures for effecting coordination among the Governments of the States concerned in the matter of implementation of such projects and schemes;
- (b) where a project or scheme is intended to benefit two or more States, recommend the manner in which—
 - (i) Such project or scheme may be executed or implemented and managed or maintained; or
 - (ii) The benefits therefrom may be shared or

- (iii) the expenditure thereon may be incurred:
- (c) on a review of progress of the expenditure, recommend to the Central Government, the quantum of financial assistance to be given, from time to time, to the State or States entrusted with the execution or implementation of any project or scheme included in the regional plan;
- (d) recommend to the Government of the State concerned or to the Central Government, the undertaking of necessary surveys and investigation of projects in any State represented in the Council to facilitate consideration of the feasibility of including new projects in the regional plan.

4. The Council shall review from time to time the measures taken by the States represented in the Council for the maintenance of security and public order therein and recommended to the Governments of the States concerned further measures necessary in this regard.

The regional plan of the council, drawn up after mutual consultations will supplement the plans of the States of the region. A separate allocation of central assistance is to be made available by the Government of India, in addition to the allocations of the individual states.

Sikkim became a member of the North East Council on 23rd December 2002 following an amendment to the North East Council Act. With exquisite natural beauty, lofty peaks, lakes, orchids and ancient monasteries, the land of the upper valley of the Teesta River is appropriately called the abode of gods---'Nye-mal-el lang'. The famous Rumtek Monastery, Tsomgo Lake and Nath La have invested the land of barely 7,096 sq. kms. with a mystic aura.

The future of the northeastern states lies in a regional perspective and therefore it calls for regional planning in critical areas. There are differences in the seven states with regard to resource endowments, levels of industrialization and infrastructure facilities. The region has to be treated as one unit, for the purpose of social and economic planning, strengthening inter-regional and intra-regional economic relations.

The major areas taken up by the North Eastern Council, include Agricultural and allied activities, horticulture, animal husbandry,

industries and minerals, sericulture, flood control, forest wealth, bio-gas, solar energy, manpower and entrepreneurship development.

The region's economic activities need integration with the rest of the Indian economy as well. There is also a scope for a common market in the region itself. The Council has so far played a great role in various key projects designed and implemented to bring about coordinated development of the entire area. The NEC is, in fact, an extension of the concern of the people and the Government. It is a recognition in itself that if a particular corner of the country remains under-developed, the country cannot claim to have achieved a balanced development and peoples' welfare. Over a period of time, it has established an identity as a mechanism to promote regional economic development.

NEW INITIATIVES

THE NORTHEASTERN STATES form about eight percent of the country's geographical area and about four percent of its population. The tribes constitute about one-fourth of the total population of the region. Four of the States are almost entirely dominated by the tribal population. The non-tribal population, interspersed with tribal groups, inhabits the plains. It has a variety of soil conditions in the plains, the hills and the valleys---from the alluvial to laterite and from red loam or hill soils to sandy loams.

With abundant natural resources, oil, natural gas, coal deposits, limestone reserves, clay, granite deposit, huge hydroelectric power potential and over sixty percent of total geographic area under forest cover, the region has immense potential for development. The Union Government has taken a number of initiatives in terms of special package for the region. These initiatives cover areas like---identifying gaps in infrastructure and basic minimum services and initiating measures to remove them, generation of employment, earmarking of ten percent of each central ministry's budget for specific programme in the region, separate industrial policy, separate export promotion policy and separate export promotion policy, for the region, improved credit flow, improvement and expansion of the railway services, water management and flood control measures, border trade and development of export trade routes, massive investment in telecommunications, electronics and tourism.

The Union Government has created a separate Ministry for the development of the northeast. Many infrastructure related projects are being undertaken with the funds released from the Non-Lapsable Central Pool of Resources (NLCPR) to the North Eastern States. The northeastern region needs transport and communication facilities. The air connectivity is being improved with addition of several 50 seaters Turbo-prop Aircraft to the fleet of the existing airlines. The North Eastern Council is undertaking Road projects covering more than one State. A separate industrial policy for the North Eastern

region is in place with specified industrial areas as excise and tax free zones. This new policy is aimed at creating a new perception for the northeastern region as an 'Investment Destination'.

The North East Council is focusing on various inter-State projects. During the Ninth Plan, the region has received Central assistance through State Plan amounting to over Rs. 23,792 Crore. The expenditure of various Central ministries in the region has gone up from 6.61 percent during 1998-99 to 7.29 percent during the year 2001-02. The Prime Minister's agenda for socio-economic development of the northeastern region is under various stages of implementation. A special package for augmenting Doordarshan and All India Radio infrastructure has been approved for implementation during the Tenth Five Year Plan. Six All India Radio projects are also being undertaken in Jorhat, Silchar, Karimganj, Lumding, Gaolpara and Guwahati to expand the existing network. The project undertaken includes upgradation of the existing uplink facility to the digital mode and FM transmission facility from Lumding.

As the transport sector is vital to any development programme, a number of road projects are also being undertaken on priority. Tripura and its capital Agartala were isolated after partition in 1947. Now the capital Agartala will be connected by rail in about three years' time and expansion work of the railway track from Badarpur in Southern Assam towards Agartala has been undertaken. The inland waterways network is being augmented. A number of stretches of the river Brahmaputra like the Dhubri—Sadiya stretch have been declared National Waterways. The river Barak is not a National Waterway but steps like techno-economic feasibility study for development of Karimganj-Lakhipur segment have been taken. The river Barak is already connected with Haldia Port through the waterways of Bangladesh under an Inland Water Transit and Trade Protocol between India and Bangladesh.

SUB-REGIONAL MATRIX

INDIA SHARES AN international border, which is as long as 4,096 km with Bangladesh, out of which the share of the northeast India comes to about 1,956 km.

The position in respect of Myanmar, Bhutan and even China is no less different. The northeast India shares 1643 km border with Myanmar, about 1000 km with China and about 650 km with Bhutan.

A region with such a long international boundary and inherent border related peculiarities, requires a suitable strategy for development. The regional economic cooperation is one of the major motivating factors for evolving cooperation among the countries of the South Asian region (SAARC), namely, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Nepal and Maldives.

The idea of sub-regional cooperation involving Bhutan, Nepal, Bangladesh and the northeast was first mooted in 1997-98. This would be some sort of a 'growth quadrangle'. This sub-regional concept will be developed within the framework of the SAARC to harness the abundant natural, mineral and water resources of the northeastern region. The region has trade ties including some border trade primarily because of close geographical proximity. According to a study by the Planning Commission there is greater need for rail link and enhancement of trade for development of the northeast region. An estimate says that the informal trade between Bangladesh and the northeastern region is to the tune of rupees 300 crores annually.

The northeastern region may work as the gateway to the burgeoning markets of South Asia and ASEAN countries. There is immense potential for joint ventures between the investors and entrepreneurs of the northeastern region and Bangladesh. The Federation of Industries of Northeastern region (FINR) has identified

specific industries under joint ventures keeping in view various natural resources. These are:

- a) Industries based on mineral resources, petro-chemical projects and downstream projects based on natural gas.
- b) Industries based on the agricultural and horticultural produce in the region, processed food products, canned vegetables, bamboo based industries etc.
- c) Projects for thermal and hydel power based on water, coal resources and gas reserves.
- d) Tourism-related industries in view of the natural scenic beauty in the northeastern region and Bangladesh.

Arrangements for avoidance of double taxation and a sub-regional mechanism for resolution of commercial disputes coupled with a strong private sector effort can go a long way to implement the growth quadrangle effectively. The Indian joint ventures in Bangladesh with buy-back arrangement in areas where India meets its requirements through imports and Bangladesh has adequate natural resources would be mutually beneficial to both the countries.

At present track connections between Bangladesh Railway and Indian Railways exist. On the western side of Bangladesh, there are two connections on Broad Gauge and one connection on Metre Gauge, which are operational. In the east there is one operational connection on Metre Gauge. These rail connections are used for movement of export-import cargo between the two countries. The proposed Trans-Asian Railway network covering a distance of about 14,000 kms would connect its southern corridors with Singapore and Indonesia, embrace the hinterland of central Asia. It would also connect the Indian sub-continent with Myanmar and Thailand in the southeastern region. The implementation of the network will require coordinated efforts involving structural adjustments and elimination of various inter-State bottlenecks.

The Trans Asian Railway (TAR) would be basically an inter-lock of national tracks of different countries. Linkages among Myanmar, Bangladesh and the northeastern states will facilitate transportation of goods for trade purposes. A proposed TAR route via Biratnagar – Ishurdi – Jamtoil – Joydevpur – Dhaka – Akhaura – Kulaura – Shahbajpur – Mohishashan (Latur, India) – Myanmar will

augment the transport infrastructure requirements of the Sub-regional grouping for economic cooperation. Moreover, a rail link between Agartala and Chittagong via Karimganj, upgradation of the rail network in Bangladesh to handle added traffic, expansion of port facilities, linkage by a new Highway from Agartala to Akhaura (Bangladesh), and Dudhnoi to Dala in Meghalaya are also necessary for realization of the full growth potential of the region. The intergration with the Trans Asian Railway Route connecting Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Bangladesh, India and Central Asia would open up immense possibilities for the northeast India.

The northeast India is in a state of change for a variety of factors. Be it ethnic assertion, preservation of the indigenous cultures, problems of underdevelopment, demographic compulsions or socio-cultural and political necessities, the region remains in the news. This necessitated occasional army intervention and counter-insurgency measures. Various states in the region including Assam were sometimes declared a 'disturbed area' and brought under the Armed Forces Special Powers Act. The security forces have to be alert to curb the violent movements 'degenerating into extremism and terrorism'.

In this context a choice of strategy with a judicious mix of various initiatives is called for. The problem is essentially a problem of the people, their aspirations, and felt needs. The idea of the Sub-regional matrix assumes added relevance in the new millennium.

The Sub-regional matrix can function as a development multiplier. It may be expressed in a formula: Growth in the northeast becomes a function of Politico-Administrative initiatives and Counter-Insurgency measures coupled with the Sub-regional matrix.

The Sub-Regional Matrix may further be dovetailed into the BIMST-EC Concept. The countries within this Grouping like Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand have resolved to fully exploit the complementarities within the region and develop short, medium and long-term plans and strategies and to implement them in a systematic and coordinate manner. The BIMSTEC now stands for Bay of Bengal initiative for Multi-Sector Technical and Economic Cooperation, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand.

EPILOGUE

THUS ENDS THE Odyssey. But the Journey of development has to continue at different levels. The paradox of poverty in the midst of plenty craves a new paradigm for integrated development. The agriculture and allied sectors dominate the economy. The percentage of people below poverty line is 36.09 in Assam, 34.44 in Tripura, 33.87 in Meghalaya, 33.47 in Arunachal Pradesh, 32.67 in Nagaland, 28.54 in Manipur and 19.47 in Mizoram as in 1999-2000.

The agriculture needs planning and a boost in terms of inputs like irrigation, fertilizers, high yielding varieties of seeds and a new technology. Over four and a half lakh families in the region depend on shifting cultivation. The progressive changeover to the terrace and settled cultivation is the only way to bring about improvement in the agrarian economy. The State governments and the North Eastern Council are making efforts to wean away the people from the wasteful mode of jhumming. The land relations and the ownership patterns have to be streamlined for an optimum result.

The infrastructure—power, transportation and communication need to be augmented for industrial development. The present industrial situation is very narrow despite a strong resource base. In Assam there are thirteen industrial estates and to improve their performance, top priority is to be accorded to the development of transport, trade, banking and marketing facilities.

The region and Assam in particular have been facing the problem of migration and population growth. The pressure on land is bound to reduce the area under forests creating serious problems for the ecological balance and agricultural productivity.

The porous border provides an easy access and to prevent infiltration, the Central Government initiated a project, following the Assam accord for construction of roads and fencing along the India-Bangladesh border in the States of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Tripura and West Bengal. The Government has also approved

Rs. 1334 Crore for construction of additional roads and fencing along the remaining portion of the border. Many other measures have been undertaken to curb infiltration and these include raising of additional battalions of Border Security Force, intensification of patrolling, both on land and river borders, and increase in number of out post towers.

The northeast has still some vestiges of disenchantment and elements of extremism. The organizations like the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) and some such organizations in Tripura and Manipur continue to remain problem areas. Efforts are continuing to curb the extremist movements and bring them into the mainstream of society, within the framework of the Indian Constitution. In December 2003 an interim Bodoland Territorial Council was set up to fulfil the aspirations of the Bodos. Over two thousand six hundred Bodo Liberation Tiger activists surrendered their weapons. This happened after many rounds of intensive talks between the Central Government and Assam Government and the Bodo Liberation Tiger leaders.

The Bodoland Territorial Council with forty six Executive Members would have administrative and financial powers. A new chapter of peace and development is expected to unfold soon.

The Naga outfit, NSCN (Isaak Swu and T. Muivah group) is having talks with the Government of India emissaries for a peaceful solution.

The northeastern states are related to the preservation of the cultural identity of various ethnic groups. What is of utmost importance is social harmony and peace with a spirit of tolerance and cooperation, a judicious balance between tradition and change.



The Seven Sisters of the North East are a fascinating bouquet of rich cultural entities with unique landscapes and a diverse mix of people. This book takes the reader through the history, language, dance, music, customs, traditions and the pulsating life in the seven states viz. Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura.

The author, Dr. P.K. Bandyopadhyay, has vast experience in mass media and sociological studies. He specializes in the study of the North East and has written several books on the region.

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